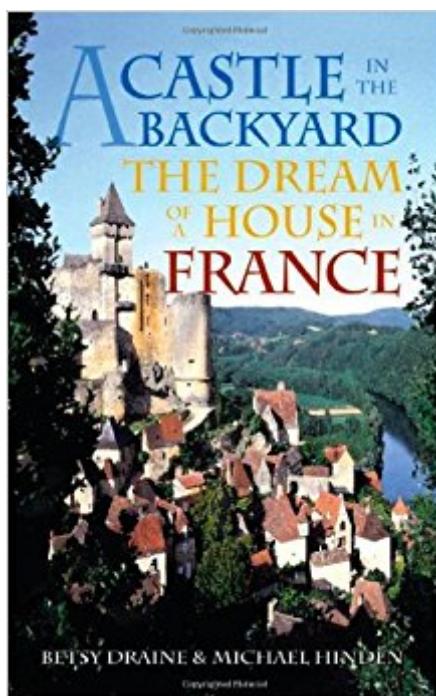


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# A Castle In The Backyard: The Dream Of A House In France



## **Synopsis**

A Castle in the Backyard chronicles the French adventures of American couple Betsy Draine and Michael Hinden, who in 1985 embarked upon a dream. After falling in love with a small stone house set beneath a medieval castle in Perigord, they bought the tranquil getaway located in one of the most beautiful river valleys in Europe. In this delightful memoir Betsy and Michael offer an intimate glimpse of a region little known to Americans - the Dordogne valley, its castles and prehistoric art, its walking trails and earthy cuisine, its people and traditions - and describe the charms and mishaps of setting up housekeeping thousands of miles from home. Insightful and poignant, this memoir chronicles the transformation of Perigord as development poses a challenge to its graceful way of life, and evokes the personal exuberance of starting over, even in mid-life.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 322 pages

Publisher: University of Wisconsin Press (March 7, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0299179443

ISBN-13: 978-0299179441

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 30 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,771,550 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > Travel > Europe > France > Dordogne #30 in Books > Travel > United States > Wisconsin > General #2374 in Books > Travel > Europe > France > General

## **Customer Reviews**

Draine and Hinden (English, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison) have charmingly recounted their past 15 summers establishing a summer home in the Dordogne valley in southwest France. With wonderful detail, they have created a colorful picture of their search for and purchase of an old stone house in the hilltop village of Castlenaud-la-Chapelle. Similar to Michael Korda's tale of relocation in Country Matters and Peter Mayle's best-selling A Year in Provence, this charming memoir brings to life the history, character, and beauty of the authors' new culture, their rural surroundings, and their quirky fellow villagers. The book includes a list of further readings for those interested in more information about the Dordogne valley, but after reading A Castle in the Backyard, you may not need the extra information it may feel as if you've already been to the south of France and loved it. Highly

recommended for travel collections in all public libraries. Mari Flynn, Keystone Coll., La Plume, PA  
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Several years ago this married couple, both professors of English at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, traveled through the Perigord, a ravishingly beautiful area of southwest France washed and backdropped by the lovely Dordogne River. Captivated by what they saw, they purchased a summer home in the particularly evocative village of Castelnaud, which is dominated by a castle built during the Hundred Years' War. The authors' recollections of their summers in the Perigord and, especially, their charming little house will delight any fan of the I-bought-a-house-abroad memoir. From remembrances of their dearest neighbor, Madame Boucher, to descriptions of local cuisine (featuring walnuts, foie gras, and truffles), to stories about the prehistoric cave paintings for which the region is well known, every one of their anecdotes is delightfully worth telling. Each detail of their account is a delicious morsel akin to the hearty fare served in every Perigord home and inn. Brad Hooper  
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This book is collection of personal experiences enjoyed by a an American couple after they decided to buy a little stone house in a village in the Dordogne. The authors are a married couple who are also English Professors, so as you would expect, the writing gets high marks for style and technique. The book invites comparison with "A Year in Provence" by Peter Mayle and "Under the Tuscan Sun" by Frances Mayes. But unlike these books, "A Castle in the Backyard" does not focus on problems encountered in the course of remodeling a stone house. Rather, the focus is on personal interactions between the American authors and the French villagers. The highlight of the book is the chapter on French food and the experience of eating dinner in a rural French home. One also gets good insight into the sense of fraternity among the French villagers and the bureaucratic nature of French civic life. I would recommend "Castle in the Backyard" to anyone who is contemplating an extended stay in a village in the south of France.

I read this book in 2008 and read it again recently to help prepare for my first trip to the Dordogne. The book is interesting, well written and informative. The authors give a good, detailed description of searching for a second home in the Dordogne, in southwest France. It is not a book about renovating an old house, but instead is about choosing a place to spend their summers and finding

a house that suits them. Then they introduce us to their village, their neighbors and the Dordogne. They work practical travel information into the book. One chapter describes the prehistoric sites the area is famous for. Another talks about local food and restaurants. And another describes some of the local walking/hiking trails. I took notes and am looking forward to visiting the area!

We've just returned from a week long visit to the Dordogne and I re-read this book to relive my still fresh memories. We rented a stone house in Domme for the week, but I can imagine how wonderful it would have been to actually spend a season there. This is a beautiful part of France and the world as a whole. It is a step back in time, not only because of the medieval villages and castles, not only because of the prehistoric cave art but because it is a region still caught in time....a glimpse of the France that was. I remember standing atop Castelnaud looking out at the gorgeous river valley and marveling that there were no golden arches or strip malls, no Walmarts or ugly housing developments to be seen. As far as the eye could see, it was picture perfect. I know that image is deceiving; that the countryside is perhaps artificially kept because of tourism, but it is still very special. The book captures the essence of the Dordogne, its culture, food, history, and people and it does so lovingly.

Having been to this area twice, it is nice to revisit it in print. Just one minor correction, for those who like to make mental pictures as they read, as I do. Beynac is very nearly due north of Castelnaud, only very slightly west, not west as mentioned in the book. This is no criticism, only correction. I am enjoying reading it.

Loved this book!

I really enjoyed reading this charming book. The author Betsy Draine is unassuming and her honesty is refreshing. It's obvious that she didn't make up stories just to spice things up. More often than not, truth is more interesting than fiction. Dordogne particularly the town of Castelnaud where the author and her husband buy a vacation home is beautifully described, but you feel her sadness as she describes the changing of the times. Another great book on Dordogne that I recommend is "The Most Beautiful Villages of Dordogne" by James Bentley and Hugh Palmer. As a matter of fact, the town of Castelnaud is featured in that book as well with some fantastic photos including one of the castle and its surrounding town on the back cover of the book. I highly recommend both! It's also refreshing to see that the story is actually set in the French region of Dordogne instead of the very

popular Provence or Tuscany. There is a list of suggested readings in the back of the book.

This tale of the purchase and repair of an ancient house on the winding path up to a castle and the local friends that were made in a beautiful village in the Dordogne, was a pleasure to read. It left me dreaming about such an adventure. I will be searching out many of the sites mentioned as well as sampling the culinary delicacies from the book when I visit the area in several months.

I found this to be a very charming introduction to a part of France that I knew very little about. I liked that it was more about forging relationships in a foreign country than about renovating a house. The book is full of the interesting characters and amusing cross cultural differences one would expect from these types of memoirs, but happily lacks the air of sarcasm and patronizing tone so often seen. The authors' love of their adopted home and the people that surround them always shows through. It inspired me enough to devote a portion of my upcoming trip to France to exploring the area.

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