



Good Reading

April, 2008

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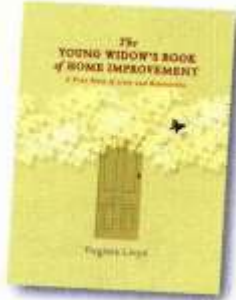
biography / memoir word of mouth

The Young Widow's Book of Home Improvement

Virginia Lloyd

Homes reflect our personalities. They mirror our likes and dislikes, act as a refuge and bear witness to our most personal moments. When Virginia Lloyd lost her husband to cancer, her home, badly affected by rising damp, grieved alongside her. As she watched her house dry from the inside out, its walls rendered, painted and transformed, she also watched herself move from a grieving widow to becoming a stronger woman with her own future to paint.

The journey through grief is universal: one doesn't need to have lost a partner to gain insight from the book's pages and such complex, conflicting



emotions will resonate with anyone who has suffered a loss.

Yet, this memoir is about so much more. It's about love. A reminder of the simple joys in life: a cup of tea made with love, moments shared over food and wine, the feeling of being home in the arms of someone you love. The bittersweet irony is that Virginia and her husband John experienced this clarity because John was terminally ill from the time they met. There was no time to waste. This book's power lies in its gentle reminder that we should all live this way; that at the end of your days to have loved and be loved is the greatest achievement of all.

★★★★ University of Queensland Press \$32.95

Reviewed by Germaine Leece

La Vie Parisienne

Janelle McCulloch

If you're not plum tuckered out with things Parisienne by now – the recent proliferation of films, songs and books devoted to the City of Light is nothing short of astonishing – you could do worse than read Australian expat journalist Janelle McCulloch's reminiscences of the year she spent living in a tiny apartment in the très chic 6th arrondissement. McCulloch has been a 'lifestyle' journalist for some years, so it's fitting that her book devotes itself mainly to style rather than substance, from the labyrinthine traps for the unwary hidden in a simple Parisienne dinner party (as she describes it, 'full of potholes of faux pas') to the cutting edge design of modern hotels,



galleries and restaurants. Even McCulloch has to admit that 'cutting edge design can just be a cut too much' as she laments the demise of yet another quirky, old-fashioned, cluttered establishment. But she drools over the cuisine of Paris, its markets, its lingerie and frock shops, the exquisite beauty of its grand boulevards and gardens, its tiny lamplit streets, the sheer magic of a lovely city as the seasons change.

The book is lavishly illustrated with evocative black and white photographs. The whole package is, like that delicious recent Julie Delpy film *2 Days in Paris*, intriguing, enticing, alluring and sometimes supremely irritating. *Magnifique!*

★★★★ Pier 9 \$32.95

Reviewed by Alison Pressley

Still No Fixed Address
Jackie Hartnell



After the death of her husband, naturalised Australian Jackie Hartnell began to travel the world, sometimes alone, sometimes with her sister Naomi. She divides her time between travelling and writing – which is a pity, as the prose never rises above the 'what I did on my holidays' level and the word 'pedestrian' springs immediately to mind. Here she is on York Minster: 'I attend evensong in the minster – truly beautiful and it sounds wonderful in that setting.' On Córdoba, Spain, during the Fiesta de Patios: 'The affluence of the area which we visit affects the quality and quantity of patio decorations used, but not the enthusiasm or pride with which they are shown.' There are far too many boring details about amenities and prices of hotels (the writer is on a constant budget) and the descriptions of people and places are ho-hum.

Hartnell's book covers visits to England, Spain, Norway, Cambodia, Vietnam and other countries, but I'm afraid I didn't get beyond Norway. Jackie Hartnell is obviously very nice but unless you know her personally it's hard to be interested in this bog-standard journal of her travels. Lovely lady, boring book.

★ Pier 9 \$26.95

Reviewed by Roz Everett



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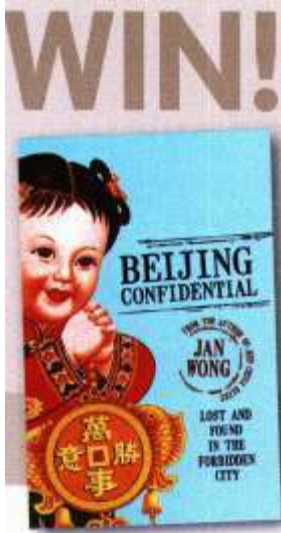
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This month 10 lucky readers have the chance to win a copy of Jan Wong's new memoir *Beijing Confidential*, valued at \$32.99 each.

In *Beijing Confidential* Wong returns to witness one of history's most extreme makeovers as the city feverishly prepares for its moment on the world stage for the 2008 Olympics. But she has a much more compelling personal reason to revisit her past. Haunted by her guilty conscience, Wong is convinced she ruined the life of a former fellow student, Yin

Luoyi, all those years ago. When Yin asked for help to get to the US, Wong promptly reported her comrade. More than three decades later she needs to make peace with the woman she betrayed - and herself.

To enter, tell us in which city this memoir is set. Write your answer, your name and contact details on the back of an envelope and mail to 'Beijing Confidential Competition', GPO Box 3835 Sydney NSW 2001 or enter online at www.goodreadingmagazine.com.

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