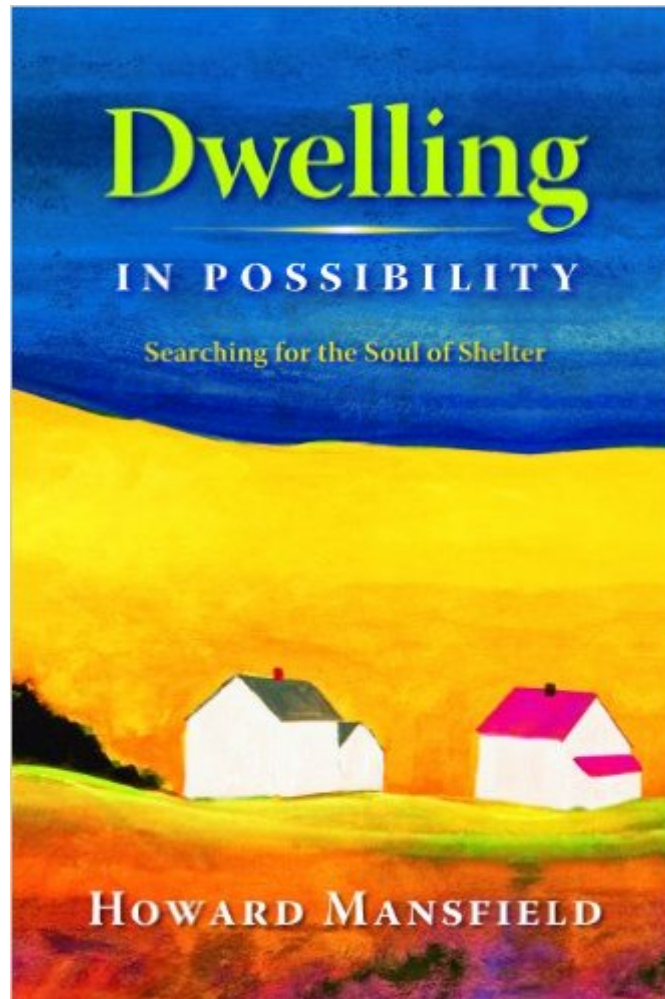


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Dwelling In Possibility: Searching For The Soul Of Shelter



Synopsis

The mystery that attracts Howard Mansfield's attention is that some houses have life "are home, are dwellings, and others aren't. Dwelling, he says, is an old-fashioned word that we've misplaced. When we live heart and soul, we dwell. When we belong to a place, we dwell. Possession, they say, is nine-tenths of the law, but it is also what too many houses and towns lack. We are not possessed by our home places. This lost quality of dwelling "the soul of buildings" haunts most of our houses and our landscape. Dwelling in Possibility is a search for the ordinary qualities that make some houses a home, and some public places welcoming.

Book Information

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General

Customer Reviews

I really should read more of Howard Mansfield's writing. It would do me good. "Dwelling in Possibility" is only the second book by Mansfield that I've read (he has several others), but it's another winner. His last effort was "Turn and Jump," which was excellent, and this follows that pattern. Mansfield likes little corners of lives and give a nice, leisurely examination of them. In this case, he starts with the word "dwelling," which has a different feel than "house" or "home." Like "Turn and Jump," this is a series of loosely connected essays on the subject of dwelling. It might be the only place where you'll read about ice storms in New Hampshire and bombings of German cities, all within two covers. The ice storm in question opens the book nicely, as Mansfield points out how it doesn't take much to cut off our electricity and turn our homes into something resembling the way people did in the 1700s - concerned with the basics such as staying warm and finding food a day at

a time. From there we sail into what's in our houses, the footpaths that connect them (a classic New England small town discussion) before getting to the World War II stuff. While I was vaguely aware of the bombing of German and Japanese cities in an effort to set them on fire, Mansfield's research reveals this to be quite interesting - full of moral trap doors. A chapter on Katrina's damage to the Gulf Coast also shows Mansfield at good form, going along for the ride as he watches that region rebuild months and months after the hurricane struck. And a chapter about the author's time as a census taker is quite charming. If you are wondering about why four stars and not five, a couple of sections weren't quite as fascinating.

Howard Mansfield is my favorite tour guide to the ordinary world. He refreshes the world around us and makes us see it anew. Mansfield sifts through the commonplace and the forgotten to discover stories that tell us about ourselves and our place in the world. About his new book, *Dwelling in Possibility*, Karen Dahood, in her blog BookPleasures.com, said it best: "I was only halfway through this book when I began to quote from it. It is strong stuff and goes deep. It should be on every thoughtful citizen's "must read" list." And Deb Baker in *The Concord Monitor*, said in her review: "Dwelling in Possibility is a shelter for the intellect, inviting, warm and true." In *Dwelling in Possibility* Mansfield searches for what makes some houses a home, and some public places welcoming. We know within seconds upon entering a new house if we feel at home. We know when a place makes us feel more alive. This is the mystery that interests Mansfield -- some houses have life, are home, are dwellings, and others don't. Dwelling, he says, is an old-fashioned word that we've misplaced. Mansfield looks at things that were once ordinary in the home, like the hearth and rooms without clutter, and he looks at homes swept away by disasters and war. He visits a relief effort in the long aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to get a sharper sense of the fragility of our dwellings and our strong commitment to making a home. He confronts the legacy of the World War II firebombing campaigns that left Europe in ruins and gave rise to three distinctly different writers who sought to restore the sanctity of home. On footpaths and in the hidden lives of many sheds, Mansfield courts the spirit of good places that Christopher Alexander calls "the quality without a name."

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