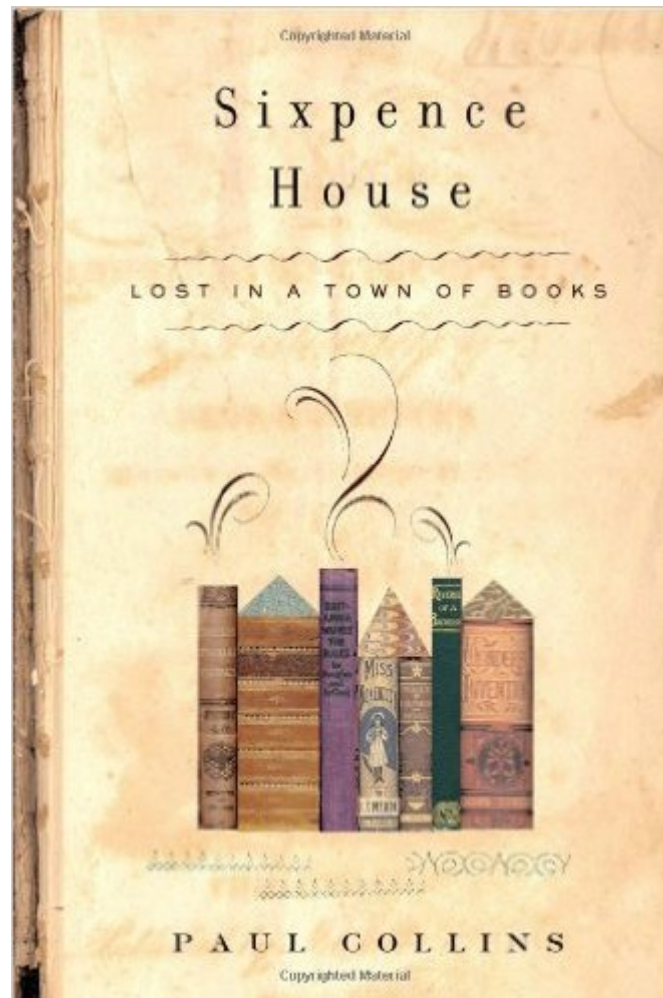


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Sixpence House



Synopsis

A bibliophile's pilgrimage to where book lovers go when they die-Hay-on-Wye. Paul Collins and his family abandoned the hills of San Francisco to move to the Welsh countryside-to move, in fact, to the little cobblestone village of Hay-on-Wye, the 'Town of Books' that boasts fifteen hundred inhabitants-and forty bookstores. Antiquarian bookstores, no less. Hay's newest citizens accordingly take up residence in a sixteenth-century apartment over a bookstore, meeting the village's large population of misfits and bibliomaniacs by working for world-class eccentric Richard Booth-the self-declared King of Hay, owner of the local castle, and proprietor of the world's largest and most chaotic used book warren. A useless clerk, Paul delights in shifting dusty stacks of books around and sifting them for ancient gems like Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable, Confessions of an Author's Wife, and I Was Hitler's Maid. He also duly fulfills his new duty as a citizen by simultaneously applying to be a Peer in the House of Lords and attempting to buy Sixpence House, a beautiful and neglected old tumbledown pub for sale in the town's center. Taking readers into a secluded sanctuary for book lovers, and guiding us through the creation of his own book, Sixpence House becomes a meditation on what books means to us, and how their meaning can still resonate long after they have been abandoned by their public. Even as he's writing, the knowledge of where his work will eventually end up-rubbing bindings with the rest of the books that time forgot-is a curious kind of comfort.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Paul Collins has written something like the perfect book for bibliomaniacal Anglophiles. *Sixpence House* is the story of his migration--with wife and infant son--from San Francisco to Hay-on-Wye, a village in the Welsh countryside with some 1500 inhabitants--and, remarkably, 40 bookstores. Hay is a picturesque town, with cobblestone streets and thatch-roofed houses and its own castle, a half-ruined edifice occupied by Hay's self-proclaimed king, who happens to be, as are so many of Hay's inhabitants, a bookseller. Collins and his family rent an apartment in town (his mailing address becomes, simply, The Apartment: it's that small a village) and live out of their suitcases and stroller while house hunting and book buying. The author also works part-time for the king in his bookstore, a place crammed with more musty volumes than the royal's workers can ever organize. Collins' attempt to buy an old house in Hay--he toys with purchasing the eponymous Sixpence House, a lopsided former pub that threatens to be a money pit--merely provides the skeleton for the author's delightful, meandering narrative. It is at times hilarious, as when, for example, Collins describes his first book-reading, or rather, his pre-reading sojourn in the bathroom: "There's nowhere dry for me to put my papers down, so I have to tuck my papers under my chin while I pee, which works till--chiff--into the toilet, and I grab, and recoil, then grab again--and I have saved my manuscript, the thing I am still hoping to read from this evening, except for the first page, which is not just soaked, it is soaked with urine. I stand alone in the bathroom, horrified. I do not have another copy with me. But, what they do have here is--a hand dryer. And so there I stand, drying off my masterpiece over the ineffectual vent.

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