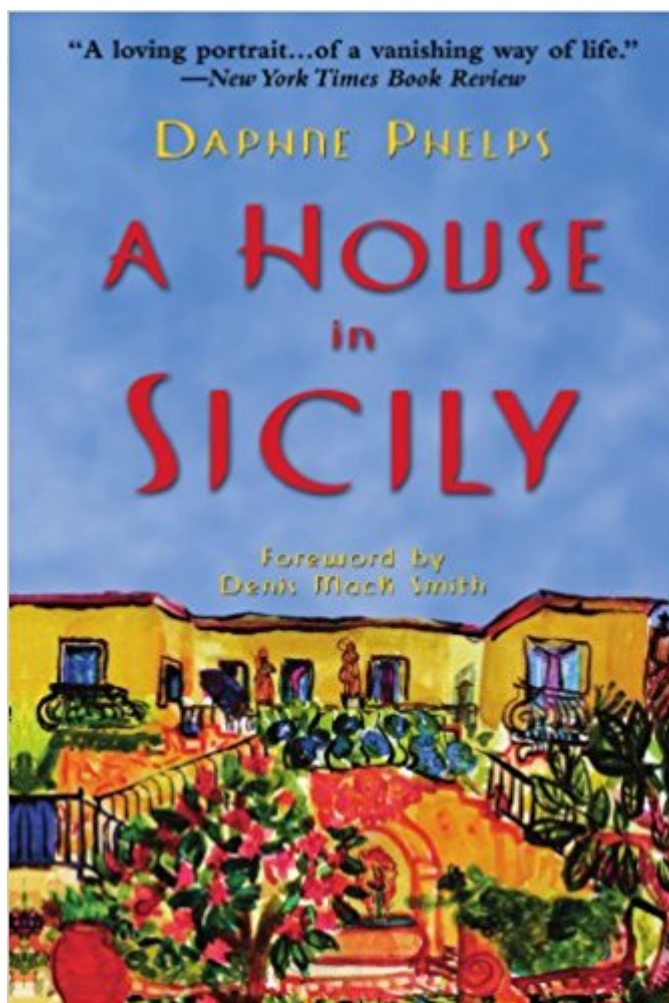


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# A House In Sicily



## Synopsis

This is the captivating memoir of a resourceful woman who started life anew in the "most beautiful house in Sicily." For fifty years, at Casa Cuseni in the small Sicilian town of Taormina, Daphne Phelps has extended her English charm and warm hospitality to seasoned travelers and professional escapists as well as to writers and artists like Tennessee Williams, Bertrand Russell, Henry Faulkner, and Roald Dahl. This memoir tells their story, and hers. It begins in 1947 when, thirty-four years old and war-weary, a modest Englishwoman arrived in Taormina with little Italian, less money, and a plan to sell the property she had unexpectedly inherited. Instead, she fell in love, not just with the airy quarters of the golden stone house on a hillside but also with a community and its way of life. To save Casa Cuseni from certain demolition, Daphne converted her enchanting inheritance into the wondrous pensione that for nearly half a century she has run with the blessing of every Taorminan from the local silk-shirted godfather, Don Ciccio, to Concetta Genio, her steadfast cook, housekeeper, and friend. "A loving portrait ... of a vanishing way of life." - New York Times Book Review; "The often humorous clash of cultures ... [and] the stories of the ordinary Sicilian men and women who populate the pages that make this book, and this place, so special, ... so thoroughly alive." - Chicago Tribune.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"I had always been a bit of a maverick," writes Daphne Phelps, looking back on why--at the age of 34--when she unexpectedly inherited a grand house in Taormina, Sicily, she gave up her profession in London, left behind her ordered life with its museums, theater, family and friends, and embarked

on a life-long adventure. Reading her intriguing memoir, one is glad Phelps chose the unconventional path: after inheriting her uncle's Casa Cuseni with its terraced gardens and staggering views of Mt. Etna, she struggles to make ends meet, but instead of selling the estate, opens its doors to a steady stream of paying guests and visitors--many of them artists, writers, and intellectuals. Inheriting an estate in Italy in 1947 isn't quite like winning the lottery, it turns out. In short sketches, Phelps reminisces about stepping into small-town Sicilian life, war-weary, speaking very little Italian, and even more scandalous, being unmarried. With her no-nonsense British humor, she recounts the typical conversation with men, young and old: "Are you married?" "No." "When are you going to get married?" "Chi lo sa--who knows?" And then, "Why aren't you married?" Settling into daily life at Casa Cuseni, Phelps dons boots and digs into the garden, rolls up her sleeves and cleans the baroque carvings over the salon fireplace, and learns to manage the property and its full-time staff. As she points out in the book's conclusion, for more than 50 years now, house-related problems have kept her on her toes--those, and her amazingly devoted servant, cook, and even the local Mafia don, whom she all describes with more than a little condescension in a series of deft portraits. While Phelps's cynicism can be a bit hard to take when she's serving up her servants, she is, perhaps, at her best when telling stories about her famous houseguests: Bertrand Russell, Henry Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, even Roald Dahl. Some were charming, some were horrid. But the visitors came from 26 countries, with friends introducing their friends. Around the dining room table and in this volume Phelps has mixed people who in "normal life would be unlikely to meet." It is this Sicilian menagerie--anchored to a singular place and time, and viewed through a British prism--that makes Phelps's life story so worth the telling. --Kimberly Brown --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this charming memoir, Phelps recounts how she indirectly inherited a villa in Taormina shortly after the end of WWII. Her uncle, who had originally purchased the land and built the house, left no will, so the villa went to the author's aunt. Realizing that her aunt had no interest in the property, Phelps, who is British, headed to Sicily with the intent to sell but ended up as enchanted with the area and the property as her uncle had been. She turned the house into an inn in order to make enough money to maintain it, and later she received many famous guests, Roald Dahl among them. Phelps is clearly well integrated into Taormina after 50 years, and she lovingly and teasingly depicts her companions. Concetta, who has worked for the author for three decades, is a no-nonsense woman who initially insisted she couldn't serve as cook because she knew how to prepare only Sicilian food. Phelps, who was a social worker before moving to Italy, has a keen anthropological

eye. Her portrait of a local Mafia don, who has no phone but instructs her simply to phone his village's main operator if she needs to reach him, manages to be both humorous and serious. Another chapter on the local police forces Carabinieri, the sanitary police, the financial police, etc. captures Italy's bureaucracy beautifully. Since chapters are organized by topic, occasionally the date of certain events is unclear, but otherwise, this is a refreshing look at a place that so many have stereotyped and so few have known as well as Phelps. Illustrations. not seen by PW. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The author could have been a writer all her life, so eloquent is her prose. The book is part travelogue and part autobiography; it is always about the people of Sicily. Amazing how settling-in trials could be so interesting, and the characters - not just the famous ones - so rich. Ms. Phelps is wildly observant, empathetic, and wonderfully enthusiastic. I wish she were still alive so I could tell her how much I enjoyed this book.

Such a wonderful read! I just didn't want to put it down and I definitely wanted the stories to continue. It transported me to a wonderful place and time and would highly recommend it to others. Thinking of going to Sicily? This is a must read. I can't wait to go experience in person.

Once I recovered from my extreme jealousy (IMAGINE INHERITING THIS EXQUISITE HOUSE IN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AREA OF SICILY!), I was able to enjoy the ride! The author must have been quite an extraordinary person, to have interwoven her life with those of the locals so affectionately. Her stories and descriptions of the charming Sicilians - and visitors-who populated her world are heartwarming. A beautiful description of a disappearing world. "O Time, suspend thy flight!".

Can't wait to visit.

The writing is outstanding, and the episodes are very interesting. I'm going to travel to Sicily in a few weeks and feel that I now have some insight into the area.

A favorite of mine. I had to buy a replacement copy because it wasn't returned! This is a charming and entertaining book and I am grateful that she wrote it.

I love this book! It is a great true story!

lovely book. my favorite book of 2015.

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