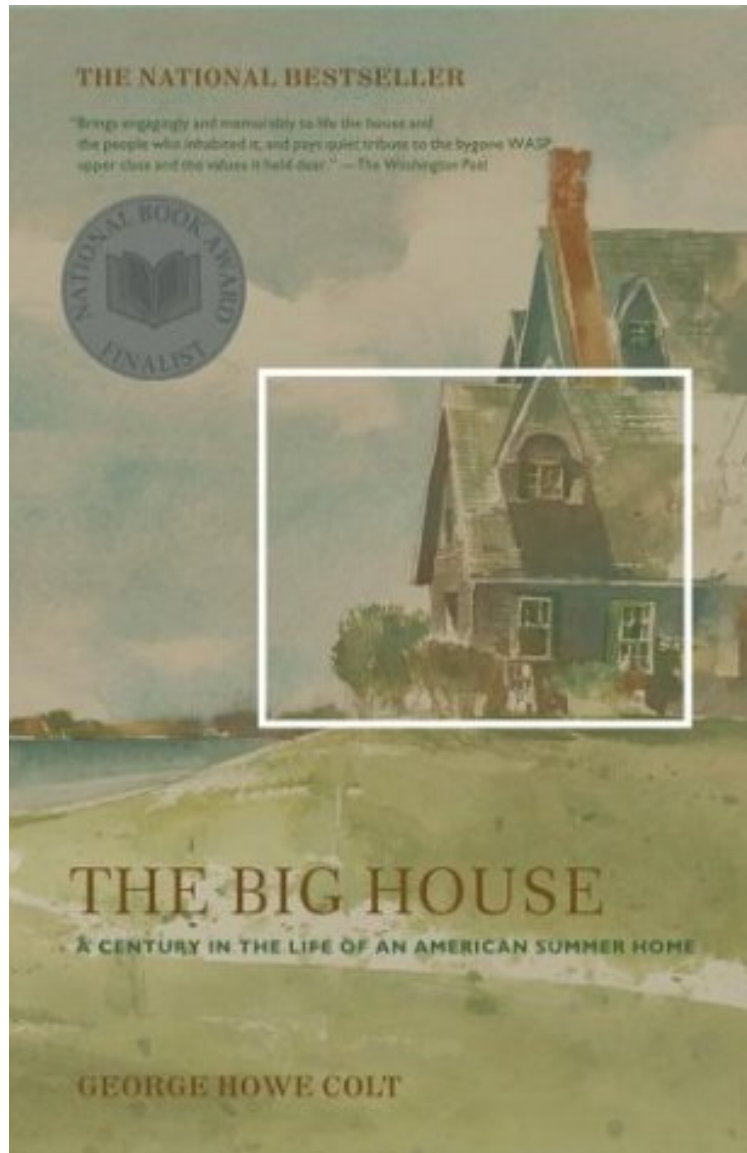


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The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home

George Howe Colt

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George Howe Colt : The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Curl up with this book and enjoy! By Gail from Lake Geneva I read

this book through a book group, and I'm glad I did. It was an interesting family history that made the term "Boston Brahmin" come to life. Each chapter focused on a different aspect of owning a second home. Mr. Colt did an amazing job of telling the story as if he weren't an integral part of it. It can be hard to separate yourself like that. Good reading as a historical novel, a family saga, and to get a better understanding of the Boston area. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. so many memories By Rufus T. Codbone Though not Boston Brahmin, I grew up in a family that referred to themselves as "swamp Yankees". Different circumstances, same basic mindset. The main difference perhaps is that we had no money or social standing. We are just old New Englanders. Our roots go way back to the earliest settlers of the region. The story of the big house brings back so many memories of my family summers on The Cape. The extended family, the traditions, the smells and sounds. And that change of mood that hits going over the bridge, onto the cape. Although the book is about the Colts on Buzzards Bay, I can relate many of the stories to the Mains on Aunt Debbie's Lane in Dennisport. I really enjoyed reading about the history, the legacy and the traditions of the big house. They brought back so many memories of my summers growing up on The Cape. The big house is an enjoyable escape down memory lane and a must read for those who remember the days of "summering" at the beach house. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Very meaningful for me By William Henley I picked out this book for my Kindle because it seemed like an appropriate choice for reading during my annual stay at the family summer cottage, where I have been going for over 50 years since early childhood. It was indeed. My own "big house" is a relatively small cottage, and it is in northern Michigan rather than Cape Cod (an area I've never visited). (On the other hand, coincidentally, the "big house" and the cottage were both first built in the same year, 1903.) Nonetheless, I almost felt as if I had lived parts of the story along with the author. The tendency to regard the summer home as more my "real" home than any of the places I've actually lived most of the year... the urge to try to hold back time by keeping the cottage and its surroundings as much unchanged as possible... the mixture of happy and sometimes sad family memories associated with the place... the issues as different family members try to share the cottage on an equitable basis, and the concerns about whether the family will remain financially able to retain the property... all these have been part of my experience as well as the author's. And as a result, the central "story line" as to whether in the present day the "big house" will have to be sold and torn down, or whether the family can somehow save it, generated more suspense for me than many a fictional story involving the fate of the world. (On the other hand, I suppose to someone who has never had the experience of sharing a summer home of this sort, the story told here might seem less meaningful and even insignificant compared to the more life-and-death type problems faced by some people. I sometimes have to remind myself, when I feel bad about not being able to spend as much time at the Michigan cottage or take part in as many activities there as I would like, that others would have grounds to envy me for being able to go there at all.)

Faced with the sale of the century-old family summer house on Cape Cod where he had spent forty-two summers, George Howe Colt returned for one last stay with his wife and children. This poignant tribute to the eleven-bedroom jumble of gables, bays, and dormers that watched over weddings, divorces, deaths, anniversaries, birthdays, breakdowns, and love affairs for five generations interweaves Colt's final visit with memories of a lifetime of summers. Run-down yet romantic, *The Big House* stands not only as a cherished reminder of summer's ephemeral pleasures but also as a powerful symbol of a vanishing way of life.

From Publishers Weekly The epicenter of the Colt family is the Big House, built in 1903 on Wings Neck, a deserted strip of Cape Cod. It's not only an architectural gem but a device to chronicle family, local history and the culture of Boston Brahmins—and it accomplishes that task with charm, style and solid research. For 42 summers, Colt traveled from winter homes across the U.S. to partake in this magical place. It's where he learned to swim and play tennis, and where he kissed his first girl. Indeed, the Big House has seen five weddings, four divorces, parties, anniversaries and love affairs. The Colts, a once venerable tribe, had lost their money—"it is not wealth so much as former wealth that defines Old Money families"—but were determined to keep their ancestral home. Time may have marched on, but the Big House refused to cooperate: "Everything in this house breathes of the past." Gilbert Sullivan sheet music, rotary telephones and ancient globes grace its interiors. Yet all is not perfect in this palace by the sea. Colt, like playwright A.J. Gurney, is adept at exposing the dark underbelly of WASP restraint, recording the mental illness, alcoholism and despair that have plagued his family. His one comfort? The Big House. This love letter to the past is a quiet delight. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *The New Yorker* In 1903, the author's great-grandfather, a Boston Brahmin named Edward W. Atkinson, built his family a house on Cape Cod, at Wings Neck, the last undeveloped peninsula overlooking Buzzards Bay. The Big House, as this multi-storied conglomeration of gables, dormers, and bays came to be called, included "eleven bedrooms, seven fireplaces, and a warren of closets, cupboards, and crannies that four generations of Wings Neck children have used for games of Sardines." It was also an expensive firetrap with sixty-seven windows in need of attention, leaking roofs, wildlife procreating in its walls, and no indoor shower. In 1992, after agonized debate, the family decided to put it on the market. Colt's account, like the house that lies at its center, is full of surprises and contains more than seems humanly possible: a family memoir, a brief history

of the Cape, an investigation of nostalgia, a catalogue of local fauna, a study of class, and a meditation on the privileges and burdens of the past. Copyright 2005 The New YorkerFrom BooklistThere are those who use the word summer more as a verb than a noun; who suspend their daily urban or suburban lives to journey to another place so as to immerse themselves in its essential "otherness." Colt summered at the Big House, a rambling, 11-room, multibayed, -gabled and -dormered Cape Cod mansion built by his great-grandfather, inventor Ned Atkinson. For a century it has stood sentry on a bluff overlooking Buzzard's Bay, attracting various Colts and Atkinsons as a spot where they can retreat and recharge, where they return to relive a past era's simpler times. Now a financial burden, the Big House is up for sale, and Colt makes a final pilgrimage to pay homage to an idyllic retreat whose splendor and purpose may be vanishing but whose significance is eternal. In a touching, deeply felt memoir, reminiscent of Willie Morris' *North toward Home* (1967), Colt goes beyond his own wistful longing, rendering keen observations of a lifestyle borne of privilege, perpetuated by tradition, and celebrated through elegance. Carol HaggasCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved