



# House: A Memoir

*Michael Ruhlman*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# House: A Memoir

*Michael Ruhlman*

## **House: A Memoir** Michael Ruhlman

Michael Ruhlman's uncanny knack for taking a wide range of subjects and making them completely his own has gained him acclaim and popularity. In his latest offering, he owns the subject both figuratively and literally: his home. House really began in 1901 when a family moved into a brand-new house in Cleveland Heights--full of hope for the future and pride in their stunning home. But as time moved on, upkeep began to wane and, in the end, the house went on the market. And there it stayed for quite some time, until the Ruhlman family decided to buy the dilapidated building. With the always-tedious home-buying process and expensive repairs soaring into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, the American Dream can seem like the American Nightmare. Detailing the purchase and renovation of a single family home, **House** explores the importance of the place we live in, our yearning to establish it, and the importance of the actual structure, its impact on our intellectual and spiritual lives, and on the struggles of a family. Packed with useful information and stories written with a storyteller's flair, **House** is a dramatic narrative by a gifted writer who eloquently concludes that be it ever so humble, a castle or a row house downtown, there's truly no place like home.

## **House: A Memoir Details**

Date : Published March 7th 2006 by Penguin Books (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9780143036647

Author : Michael Ruhlman

Format : Paperback 243 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Architecture, Biography Memoir, Biography

 [Download House: A Memoir ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online House: A Memoir ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online House: A Memoir Michael Ruhlman**

---

# From Reader Review House: A Memoir for online ebook

## Denis says

After Ruhlman becomes the latest owner of a century old home he finds that home is more than a place to set your anchor or call your castle. As he looks at what this home has come to mean he begins to see the bigger picture in perspective. The neighborhood's history and development is linked to the surrounding community's circumstances back at that time. Where the house finds itself today is connected to all of the subsequent and interconnecting socio-economic factors since then. Home is the locus, the center, the vibrant core of all of our doing. Be it ever so humble all of our life's endeavors are placed in the context of their relation to that point of origin. Ruhlman's memoir takes the reader on his own journey, back home with him where he discovers a deeper sense of personal identity.

---

## Du says

I swear I've read this before, but maybe I've just read books like it. The sharing of history and memories of home rehab and family life are always a catch for me.

---

## Cindy L says

This book was ok. I was expecting more stories. Some of the detail was too much. Meh.

---

## Arajane says

I can't remember the last time I hated a book so much. Michael Ruhlman is either an idiot or an asshole or, more likely, the worst combination of the two.

---

## Carlie says

This book is a fun read if you like old houses, own an old house you're fixing up, wish you owned an old house, think you might be buying an old house or are shopping for an old house. Its all about one man uncovering the pieces of history his newly purchased dream house holds. But, its also about American suburbs, the psychology of "home", community, neighborhood, parenthood and marriage. I was surprised how psychological and philosophical the author got as he mused on all the connections his house brought up for him. I was inspired by his exciting purchase, the heroic renovation efforts he undertook and his genuine interest in all the pieces of home ownership: being part of a neighborhood, remembering homes of your past and what they meant to you, making a cozy nest for your children, ideals and when they help and hurt, and even how being a home owner effects friendships. Good thoughts all. The author is a deep thinking but, not obscure and that was fun to observe.

I was pleased that the author shared the warts as well as the exhilaration of this kind of an undertaking. I am a dreamer of old houses. I wish I had one and I wish I had a shabby one so that I could take on its resurrection. While, the author does share the exciting and heartwarming pieces of his project he also doesn't withhold the headaches, the stresses and the out and out absurdity. I think the idea of this kind of project sounds wonderful but, the truth is, unless both marriage partners are dreaming of it it will be generally a negative in your marriage. I was saddened to see that the author seemed to be living his individual fantasy by buying and fixing up the house, he also had left his wife in the dust emotionally and that hurt to watch. I appreciate honesty and it felt very authentic for him to be transparent enough with the reader to let them know what problems the house caused for he and his wife relationally but, I felt sad that so little resolution happened. I wonder if they're still married and if they are still in that house.

The author also had a view of childhood I couldn't relate to. Part of why he wanted to buy a cool old house and fix it up was for the sake of his children. He wanted them to have a stable, centered sense of "home" and feel connected deeply to someplace that meant cozy childhood for them. That's a worthy goal and something I can really relate to. The hitch was in why he wanted to do that. He felt like childhood was the really happy, golden part of life for him, adulthood was sort of depressive and dragging and full of nagging responsibilities and not much fun any longer. Childhood was the time he looked back to as "when he was really happy." My reaction was, "Yikes! Really?" I love being an adult and feel like I enjoyed childhood but, honestly, I think I like being a grown-up better. I love the freedom to make my own life and be whatever I wish. I feel more confident as an adult, safer, happier, more empowered, more skilled and I have a rich tapestry of memory and experience to draw on now.

The last bone I had to pick with Ruhlman was his personal attitude towards the workers who did most of the actual renovating. He seems demanding, a bit dehumanizing, slightly disrespectful, grouchy, pushy...and yes, a little prissy around the edges. Maybe this is the carpenter's daughter in my that is talking but, I feel all of these things rather strongly and have a hard time understanding why homeowners who are demanding and superior with their contractors are then shocked and angered when the work they receive isn't perfectly up to par and communication begins to deteriorate.

Anyhow, all that to say. Fun book, great warm-up for house hunting (which is what I was hoping it would be) and well written although not perfect and a touch bittersweet.

---

## **Melissa says**

In the summer of 2001, author Michael Ruhlman and his wife, Donna, decided to buy a century-old home in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. This decision set forth a months-long decision-making, remodeling, moving, and adjustment process that he details in this fascinating memoir. Mingled with the sometimes frustrating, sometimes joyful, mostly harrowing construction issues, Ruhlman sets out to discover the history of his neighborhood, the home they have purchased, and the true meaning of home and suburbia.

Michael grew up in Cleveland but spent many years living in other places. He felt himself drawn back to the city by forces he cannot describe. Although his photographer-wife is not thrilled with the idea of living there the rest of her life, she is caught up with him in what he describes as "house lust." It's that innate desire to nest, to have a home to call your very own, to put your own stamp on a place. He talks about the buying process, the home inspection, hiring contractors, and dealing with the construction. Ruhlman's research takes him into the definition of suburbs, their development and downfall, and what home really means to each of us and why.

For anyone who has an interest in home remodeling or has gone through the process themselves, *House* is a fascinating look into an all-too-familiar series of events. Ruhlman's transparency about his happiness and misgivings about the project make the book easy to read and like watching a home improvement show on television with an insider's view. If you're interested in older homes, remodeling, home improvement, historical research, or memoirs, *House* delivers on all accounts.

---

### **Ben says**

I read this while traveling and was less impressed with Michael Ruhlman than I have been with others who've written about the process of home building and renovating. I found the parts of the book that dealt with the history of Cleveland and of this house much more insightful and interesting than the parts about the actual work. While Ruhlman's self-deprecating humor about he and his wife's hopeless optimism about their massive project was entertaining, they frankly sounded to me like nightmare clients. As a carpenter, I would not be too excited about renovating an entire house while the owners lived on the top floor, especially owners whose budget and patience both seemed to be in shorter supply than one might hope for. Overall, I'd recommend this, but you'd probably be better off reading David Owens' *The Walls Around Us* or Tracy Kidder's *House* if you want real insight about the home building process.

---

### **Ryan says**

This is a book about how Ruhlman, his wife, Donna, and their two children acquire an old house, gut it, and then turn it into their dream home. For some reason, this book's community reviews page, which has 3.6 average rating, is led by several one star ratings.

There are a few things to dislike about this book. If you google the author, you'll find a write up that states that he likes food and sex. How unique, and thank you for sharing. For whatever reason, people who write these house memoirs never include photos or floor plans. Why not? (I couldn't find many photos online either, though I'd love to see the kitchen that has a fireplace.) Sometimes, the focus of the book becomes dull; though I may be alone in this, I couldn't bring myself to care about the unique history of Cleveland suburbia.

The book is still quite good, especially within the genre -- I'm not sure what it's properly called -- of "let's buy an old house" memoirs. The house is interesting, as is the project.

More widely, the book can be read as outlining what Americans want (more, *desperately*) and how they feel about that desire (they feel they deserve it, dammit, and we'll figure the costs out later). It can be read as a defense of suburbia, and in my opinion quite a convincing one, as well as a reminder why people would choose to live in the midwest rather than the coast as well as why they shouldn't. The chapter on the "Secrets of a Suburban Marriage" was, in my opinion, pretty excellent. If you ever looked at those Four Freedoms paintings and thought "That looks insane. Doesn't this look insane to everyone?" then read this book.

This was the first book I read by Ruhlman. He appears to be an almost cliché food writer (sort of Bourdain lite or Bourdain without the travel life), but I'd read other books by him, particularly if they aren't about food. Maybe even if they are about food.

---

## Chris says

I couldn't resist this memoir about the restoration of an old victorian house in a Cleveland suburb. Having my own house obsession, an addiction to HGTV, and a love of memoirs - this seemed right up my alley of interest. And it was, but I found the narrative a bit dry and hollow at times. For all the passion he has about his house and the whole process of renovating and making this old house the perfect new home, there is a rather somber quality to all the problems (the ghosts, the contractors, the fights) and while these less than perfect moments make it "real", I don't know, there was also an unexpected sadness to it.

In addition to the main story about the process of finding the house, buying the house, renovating the house, moving into the house, and living in the house, he also gives a fair amount of history about Cleveland, the particular neighborhood he lives in and the history of suburbs in general, all of which was quite interesting. But I've read historical fiction and memoirs that merge the personal story with the historical one much better and I found my attention wandering at times, wanting to skip to the more passionate and personal parts. So while I wanted much more from this, I did enjoy the story about a house and it gave me some ideas about researching the history of a house in city records.

---

## Jessica King says

I liked the history part. And the house part partly.

BUT the stereotyping of people set me off right away. There was one particular line that I'm surprised passed an editor. The rant the wife goes on in the bank drive up window makes me dislike the couple right away. I'm sure they're nice people, setting standards for yourself is healthy, and I know this was a very stressful situation, but I have my own perceived notions that just didn't mesh. The personable side of the book threw me. I have been on a house-book kick. I can fall in love with a house - especially one full of detail and craftsmanship. But I just couldn't here.

---

## JC says

Some of this book was pretty good - as someone who has never lived with a sense of geographical community, it's interesting to read about why he thinks it's important (he inspired me a little to look for it). And I was drawn into the history of suburbs, and liked his contrast of suburbs which serve a city vs exurbs and so forth which aren't attached to an urban center, which helped me understand some of why living in Santa Clara is so different than the suburb of DC I grew up in. I'll admit that by the end, I liked Cleveland more than before I started, but nowhere near as much as he does, so while a little history was entertaining, there was a lot more than I would have liked.

His periodic digressions into gender roles and how men and women are fundamentally different \*really\* grated. The binary gender essentialism was truly ridiculous, and to conclude that the reason there are women's book clubs but not men's book clubs (leaving aside gay men's book clubs which don't exist in his heteronormative world) is that women fundamentally need social connections with each other while men are loners who have no need to talk is not only offensive and oversimplifying, it shows an obliviousness to sexism that is truly astonishing.

That said, I especially liked the parts about cooking and being a chef, and will probably try out one of his books on those subjects.

---

### **Judie says**

HOUSE A Memoir is the story of buying and renovating a hundred-year-old house in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, but of the development of both Cleveland and Cleveland Heights, the way houses have changed over the centuries, and the meaning and effect of a house and home on a family. Why is a culture where twenty percent of the population move annually made up of people longing for a home? How does a house shape a family? He observes that people take better care of something, including a home, when they know they are going to have it for awhile.

When did families move from living in a single room to having separate rooms for various activities and privacy? He implies that is a post-Middle Ages phenomenon but there were homes with several rooms two thousand years ago in Jerusalem. He credits the Dutch for developing the modern form of a house as a way to help children develop into adults.

When their children were preschool, they decided to buy a house to give the children the anchor they believed were necessary for a child's emotional stability. They found a magnificent house (four stories, lots of rooms for their life style and needs) in a neighborhood of beautiful old houses. The house had been on the market for several months and they realized it needed a lot of major work to pass inspection and be livable. Michael Ruhlman, the author, grew up in Shaker Heights, the community immediately to the south of Cleveland Heights. His wife, Donna, was raised in Flushing, New York. They moved to Cleveland Heights because Michael realized he could do his work anywhere and wanted to return to his roots. Also, the cost of living in Cleveland was much, much lower than it was in most other cities. Donna really missed living close to the East Coast. The disruption of working on the house and having different perspectives on where to live plays havoc with their marriage.

The main part of the book describes the process of inspecting the house, buying it, and renovating it, partly by their own work and partly by hiring professionals. The whole family lived crowded into a few rooms on the third floor for several months until the main parts of the house became usable. As almost every home owner will discover, things did not always go smoothly.

HOUSE talks about how the cities of Cleveland and Cleveland Heights developed and the role that public and private transportation, from horse and carriages to streetcars to private cars affected the growth of neighborhoods.

He checked government records to find out when the house was built, by whom, and who had lived there before his family. He was able to speak to some of the previous residents who related what life was like when they lived there. Along the way he discovers what he believes to be the wrongful imprisonment of a former resident.

HOUSE provides an interesting and useful guide for people considering purchasing and remodeling a home as well as a guide on tracking down information about the history of a house.

I think the book could have been improved by the inclusion of pictures of the house, before, during, and after the renovations. Donna is a photographer so it should have been doable.

---

### **Laura says**

This is probably a strangely passionate reaction to such a bland book, but Michael Ruhlman really pissed me off. Despite the fact that the jacket cover depicts this as a story about renovating a house and its strenuous

effect on a family, actually about 85% of it revolves around the history of the Cleveland suburb where it takes place. Which wasn't terribly interesting to me personally, but it would be fine if that were the subject of the book. Or even OK for maybe a chapter somewhere in the early half in a discussion about why they wanted to live there. Or something. But, SPOILER ALERT:

Why they want to live in Cleveland Heights is taken for granted. The author grew up there. He wants to live where he grew up, even though he fleetingly mentions several times that his wife would prefer to be elsewhere. His description of gutting and renovating the house is so superficial that it's clear he really had no actual investment in what was going on, other than that it was taking a long time and would eventually be a huge, cool, old house in his boyhood home. Whenever he mentions his wife - who, by the way - gave up her career to stay home with their kids, in Cleveland, where she doesn't want to be, and also is supervising the contractors and fixing things around the house herself while simultaneously caring for two kids (one still in diapers) full time, cleaning, doing laundry, etc. They have no real family or friends around (except the author's dad, who is letting his son come hang out and write in HIS house to avoid the nuisance of WORK going on at his own home every day), so she really has no help. So anyway, whenever he mentions his wife, he refers to her as "lovely" and "beautiful" in a way that indicates not his admiration of her but condescension and placation. Finally, toward the end of the book, she blows, and tells him despite how much she loves him and their children, she needs something for herself. Time, space, appreciation. Recognition of the fact that she has no idea what to do about her abandoned career, which isn't really even feasible to pick back up where they live. He offers to stop writing for two hours each day so that she can "find an almost-full-time job during that extra time." He has ignored all along that she doesn't like it there, now they're ensconced in this house, and she is unhappy, and he basically just waits it out until she stops complaining. They build her a darkroom in the basement, and he just assumes that makes it all okay for her now, even though she has said there's no viable photography work for her there, so she just prints pictures of their kids. All of this drama is addressed in about half a chapter at the very end of the book, and it's never actually resolved, but she stops complaining, so he goes back to not worrying about it.

Oh, but one more thing. He does bitch at the end of the book when his wife wants to throw a Christmas party in their finally finished house about how the party cost them a few hundred dollars. Even though he insisted on building a freaking fireplace in their kitchen, when even the contractor advised against it because it was thousands of dollars too expensive. He had to have it to make brick oven pizzas or something. So they do. I freaking HATE this guy.

---

## **Cindy says**

I am rereading this book that I read several years ago. Michael Ruhlman is one of my favorite authors. He is very good at non-fiction books, especially at adding interesting personal information and related facts in with the basic information. His Chef series of books and his cooking guides are excellent-great resources. His book, House, is about the experience he and his family had finding and renovating an old house in the Cleveland area. It becomes more than just a diary of What Was Done Today and What Was Not Done Today and becomes an examination of houses and what they mean, their evolution and what they mean to families. I enjoy books about home renovation that include the owner's feelings and the back story to what is happening. I grew up with two uncles who spent years working on old houses so I can relate to some of this experience. And as I stated earlier, Ruhlman is an excellent writer. He makes the story enjoyable.

---



## **Michele says**

This is primarily a narrative about a writer's purchase and renovation of a 100 year plus house in the old suburbs of his hometown, Cleveland. It also spends a great deal of time pondering the values of old homes, suburbia, home ownership, marriage, and community. In general, I like this book, probably because I also own an old home, although not one nearly so grand as his. The book is at its best when it is on target discussing the importance of house and home. While I like the initial foray into the concept of suburbia, the writer seems a little defensive about the glories of the original suburbs, and seems to go on a little long on this topic. Additionally, while I can see the connection between the work required to make this house a home and the impact it had on his marriage, I did get a little bored with the marriage portion of the book. Overall, I would recommend it primarily to people who have an interest in old houses or the nature of how houses bind us to our communities. It does have some great introspective nuggets.

---