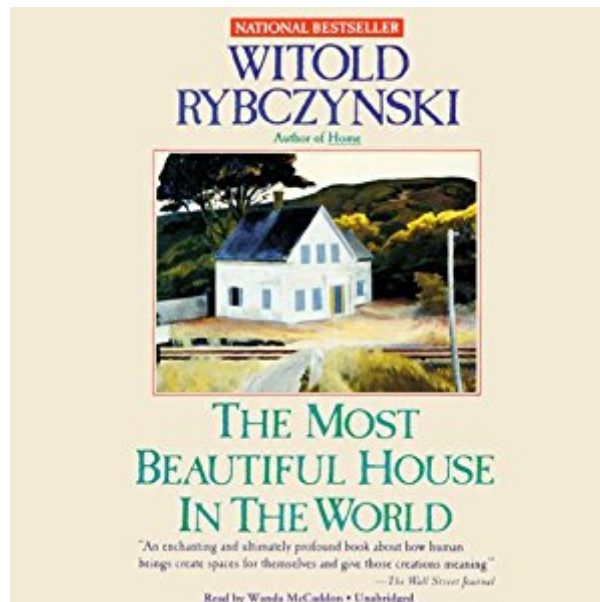


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# The Most Beautiful House In The World



## Synopsis

Witold Rybczynski takes us on an extraordinary odyssey as he tells the story of designing and building his own house. His project began as a workshop but through a series of "happy accidents" the structure gradually evolved into a full-fledged house. In tracing this evolution, he touches on matters both theoretical and practical, writing on such diverse topics as the ritualistic origins of the elements of classical architecture and the connections between dress and habitation. He discusses feng-shui and considers the theories of such architects as Palladio, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright. An eloquent examination of the links between being and building, *The Most Beautiful House in the World* offers insights into the joys of "installing ourselves in a place, of establishing a spot where it would be safe to dream."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A wall of glass bottles was the final feature completing the house Witold Rybczynski built for himself. On the oval bottom of a brown bottle of Armagnac, he inscribed the date and the names of his coworkers and signed off like an ancient craftsman: "RYBCZYNSKI FECIT." This gem of a book rewards the reader with a wealth of meaning in those words, "Rybczynski made it," revealing the whole experience - esthetic, architectural, didactic, domestic, historical, laborious, linguistic, mechanical, philosophical, poetic, sensory, symbolic - contained in this house. As it takes shape in the reader's mind, the sense of building unfolds, constructing once again Heidegger's unity: building-dwelling-thinking. The book owes its arresting title to Joseph Rykwert, chairman of the doctoral program in architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, who invited Mr. Rybczynski to

address his seminar on the subject of a design competition sponsored by an Italian journal. The author responded, "The most beautiful house in the world is the one that you build for yourself." In a previous study, "Home: A Short History of an Idea," Mr. Rybczynski, who teaches architecture at McGill University in Montreal, went beyond architecture to provide a fascinating historical exploration of domestic well-being. In his new book, he tells what it means to build his own home. First Mr. Rybczynski dreamed of a boat, then of a shelter to build it in - something between a shed and a cathedral. He and his wife, Shirley Hallam, decided to include temporary living quarters in the plan, with the idea of constructing a house nearby sometime in the future. They chose a site, he ruminated over designs, enlisted the help of his wife and his friend Vikram Bhatt, an Indian architect.

This book by the author of "Home: A Short History of an Idea" (1986) is a more subjective and less disciplined examination of that same topic. Professor Rybczynski uses his experience as an immigrant trying to "fit in" as a lens for looking at what it means to build one's own home. The skeleton of this story is the author's own decision to build a shed to which he can retreat on weekends (for more on weekends, read the author's "Waiting for the Weekend," 1991) and build a boat he can sail away in. At some point the shed becomes more of a barn and then, when he finally abandons his plan to build a boat, it becomes a permanent home for himself and his wife. For me, the book is less about architecture, the act or craft of building, and more about morphing and the unpredictable ways life unfolds. Taken in that vein, Rybczynski's story can be appreciated as a spiritual journey with many sidetrips and gentle awakenings. He is self-critical, but not self-deprecating. And he infuses his tale with enough humor to keep the reader interested without taxing credibility. I especially enjoyed his description of his wife, Shirley, who does some morphing of her own. At the beginning (when the couple was building a mere boathouse), she is little more than an extra pair of hands; when the couple decides to make the structure they have been building into their home, Shirley suddenly becomes a full-fledged "client," full of opinions and demands.

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