

that "Architecture should have no politics," the political era reshapes both the house and the lives it ensconces.

The News Where You Are By Catherine O'Flynn

Frank Alcroft, a TV news anchor, has a soft side that overpowers his life. He tends to become involved with the stories of people who die alone, seeking to acknowledge their lives with his personal act of mourning. He is drawn into solving the mystery of the hit and run accident that killed Phil, his very well-known predecessor, who he feels must also be properly remembered. He remains devoted to his mother who is the epitome of negativity while trying to decide if he should attempt to save his distant and unloving father's architectural work that is slowly being demolished around him.

A man of solid character, he seeks to do right by everyone and is a kind father and a devoted husband. If anything, Frank is too kind when he pays for corny jokes and puns from an aging comedy writer who once worked for his mentor, Phil. Frank's story, one of loss, absence, and what it means to age, is set very much in a world that seems all too familiar.



The Humbling by Philip Roth

Simon Axler, an aging actor leaves the stage when he is no longer able to perform. After a brief institutionalization for a mental breakdown, he finds himself in a relationship with a young woman that gives him the opportunity to remake her life into an image he desires. As readers, we understand that this is most likely a temporary diversion and that Simon will once again have to face reality.

Major Pettigrew's Last Stand by Helen Simonson

Set in England in contemporary times, Major Ernest Pettigrew is faced with loneliness since the loss of his wife Nancy; the strained relationship with his socially climbing son, Roger; and the sudden death of his brother Bertie. Into his life steps Mrs. Jasmina Ali, the local Pakistani shop-keeper who comes to his aid: first as driver, then as friend, Kipling-devotee, and confidante. Their burgeoning relationship is put to the test in their small and stuffy English Village and we wonder if Major Pettigrew will be strong enough to overcome traditions and take a stand. Simonson offers us an enjoyably sweet story with just enough comedy, culture clash, and conveyance of the feeling of a traditional English setting-the little world of Edgecombe St. Mary.



Director's Faves

*Books worth
reading,
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American Salvage

by Bonnie Jo Campbell

Set in blue collar mid-western America, these gritty stories explore changing values, tough times, and what it's like to be just squeaking by. Drawn together by common themes, this collection of short stories exhibits remarkable prose. Despite the hard lives lived by the protagonists, hope for a better future as well as love and compassion are portrayed. (National Book Award Finalist, 2009)

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

by Stieg Larsson

First let me say that this is not my "usual" type of book. I tend toward the genre of literary fiction and usually avoid mysteries, adventures, romance, spy stories; in essence much of popular fiction. But I enjoyed the movie adaptation of the novel and when a friend placed a paperback copy in my hands, I figured what the heck? Well, it was a great escape; a good and well-paced story, featuring interesting characters, intricate, but reasonable plot twists, and enough romance, as well as sensitivity to issues of women's rights, to add to the mix.

Mikael Blomkvist is waiting to serve a sentence for a libel conviction when he is approached by elderly industrialist, Henrik Vanger to investigate the 40 year old disappearance of his niece Harriet. Lisbeth Salander, who has also done

some work for the Vanger Corporation, becomes Blomkvist's research assistant. The young computer hacker has a photographic memory, is as punk looking as can be and is about half the age of the more staid Blomkvist, the liberal publisher of Millennium Magazine. Together, they make an interesting team as they develop theories about the Vanger family and what became of Harriet. And although these two characters become intertwined, each does just enough on their own to merit many chapters in which they alone are the stars.

There are some tough scenes in the book, many of which elucidate the Swedish title: **Men Who Hate Women**; and although at times Larsson tends to bog down in too many details of everyday life, the Swedish setting makes even that more of interest.

The Glass Room

by Simon Mawer

This 2009 Booker Prize shortlist nominee is literary and historical fiction at its best. The Glass Room is, in reality, the Villa Tugendhat, designed by Mies van der Rohe and built in 1930 in Brno, located in what we now know as the Czech Republic. In this fictionalized account, the house is the main character and witness: to the dreams of a family that want to live in a



modern space; to the takeover of the Third Reich as the Sudetenland becomes part of Germany in the late 1930's; and to the Russian occupation of Eastern Europe during the Cold War.

At its essence, it is the story of those who came to know the house during each period. Their lives unfold as they move in and out of the house during turbulent and tragic times. In the novel, architect Rainer von Abt builds a home for recently married Viktor and Liesel Landauer, wealthy automobile manufacturers and forward-looking residents of what was then a new country, Czechoslovakia. With the realization that anti-Semitism threatens their safety, the Landauers must leave their new home and flee across Europe. During the Nazi occupation the house becomes a laboratory. Later, the Communists put the space to practical use, seeing it as a symbol of past decadence. The house bears witness to social and behavioral change.

But this is not a dry tale, it is one of romance, passion, and drama as lives intersect, people come to rely on each other, and friends and lovers are forced apart by circumstance. The Glass Room opens it all to us and each character has a unique response to its transparency. Although the book's fictional architect insists