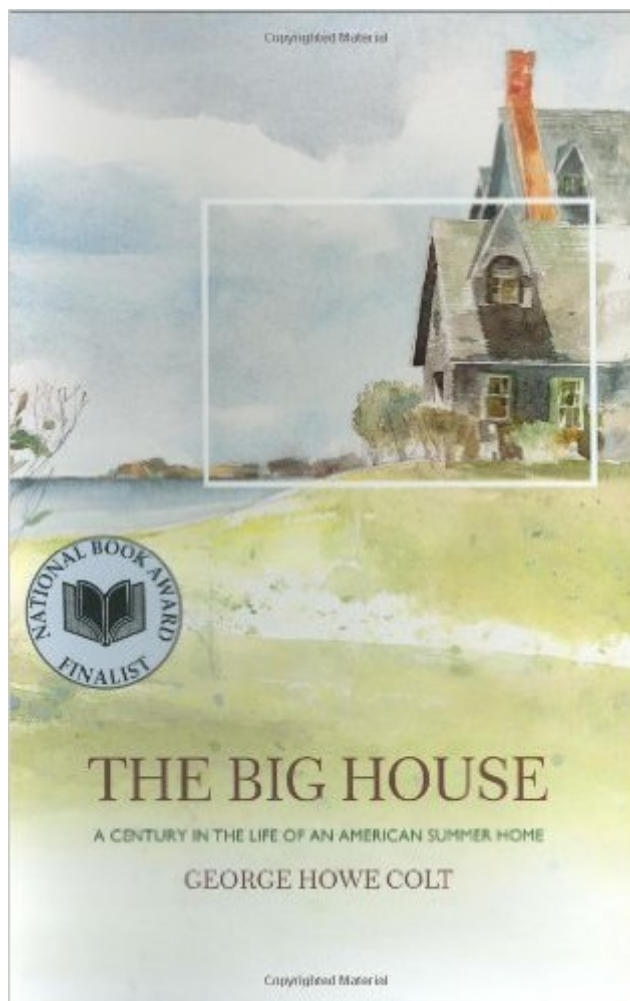


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# The Big House: A Century In The Life Of An American Summer Home



## Synopsis

A dual history of the Colt family and their summer house on Cape Cod recounts the house's construction one hundred years earlier, the idiosyncratic personalities that stayed there throughout five generations, the major family events that took place there, and the family's last month in the house. 25

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Big House" is a big piece of work by George Howe Colt. For a century, "The Big House," an eleven bedroom architectural gem on Cape Cod, has been in the Atkinson/Colt family. At the start of the book, Colt describes taking his young family to the house for what may be the last summer. Alas, the extended family can no longer afford to keep the home and it must be sold. The house has served as a center of gravity for this family, a place which pulls them back each summer to live out graceful and simple Boston Brahmin traditions. The house also serves as a metaphor for the fading fortunes of this once wealthy, once socially prominent family whose entire caste--the Brahmins of Boston--has become irrelevant. Through the prism of the house and its meaning to his family, Colt also delves into his family's history of mental illness, of marriages that become estranged, of boys that start out as golden children and end up tarnished old men. He also recounts his own story. He began his adult life as a young Brahmin with disdain for his heritage. Now in mid-life and a New Yorker, he is deeply proud of the many traits (e.g., thrift, reverence for family) bred deep in his bones. I would recommend this book to those who gravitate towards serious memoirs and thoughtful

accounts of profound issues (e.g., meaning of family). It is a beautiful read.

This is a marvelous book. It is not just the story of a summer house, and of the family that owned it for its first hundred years, it is a book about what Aristocracy means, about letting go, about accepting oblivion. There is only one drawback to the book: No maps, No family tree, No photographs. The maps you can buy, the family tree you can draw yourself as you read the book, but you need the photographs. Especially when there are so many descriptions of photos in the book. I suggest the publishing of a new "Special Edition" of the book, with reproductions of the original blueprint for The Big House, and photos of it and the successive generations of Forbes-Atkinsons- Colts -Singers who summered in it.

The Big House on Cape Cod was built more than a century ago by the author's great-grandfather. It weathered 2 world wars, joy and tragedy, the changing seasons and fortunes of two families, and the transition from the simpler life-styles of past times to our own modern 'very fast is still too slow' culture. When the house becomes financially untenable for family members to maintain, Colt returns for one last visit before it goes on sale...and there the story, a touching and wistful memoir, begins. Don't miss this lovely book.

The Big House is so many things, evokes so many feelings and alerts all of your senses. I have never really felt compelled to write a review online for anything, but when I finished The Big House, I wanted everyone to experience what I felt. First of all, it's a great summer read because it's about summers on Cape Cod in a fantastic old house. But it's also a fabulous history of a family from the turn of the century to the present. It takes you back to a different era. This writer takes you through every part of this amazing house and the path down to the water. You can feel it, you can smell it and you can hear the wind blow! It reminded me of many summers at the beach with my family and even though it wasn't on Cape Cod, there were so many similarities. You can see the worn decks of cards in the drawer and the old Monopoly games, you can smell the muffins in the kitchen, you can even picture the photographs on the walls and see the old books in the bookcases...I can't say enough good things about this book. It's a book that I didn't want to end...and yet I needed to finish to see what happens to the house. George Howe Colt is a very gifted writer. You have to read this!

...both literally and metaphorically. I found The Big House a fascinating read for several reasons.

First, Colt's story hits awfully close to home; my family, too, had a Buzzards Bay 'Shingle' house just

a few miles south of the Colt homestead, and lost it for similar reasons. The discussion of 'Cold Roast Boston' Brahmin culture and values - and the pressures these place on its scions - cuts close, too. Even grew up (winters) in the same Connecticut town, at the same time. I'm surprised we never met. I need to be clear here: Colt is a hugely gifted writer. His prose is rich and sensual; his observational powers are wonderful, and his ability to describe place - sight, smell, touch - is remarkable, as is his ability to respectfully and still accurately tell the stories of his family. In lesser hands, *The Big House* would be a maudlin bit of nostalgic pap and of interest only to those who know the area and the culture. The book avoids this trap... barely. Even so, there's something slightly self-indulgent about *The Big House*. Obviously, the creation of a book like this creates a catharsis for its author, and it was interesting - mostly - to go along for the ride. But in a book that's ultimately all about learning to let go of things we love, it's kind of ironic that the author didn't seem able to let go of the book, either. WASP families, for all their virtues, can become somewhat stifling after a while, and so does *The Big House*. Fifty or sixty fewer pages would have left me amazed, moved and wanting more. As it is, I ultimately felt like I'd stayed with the relatives a few days too long.

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