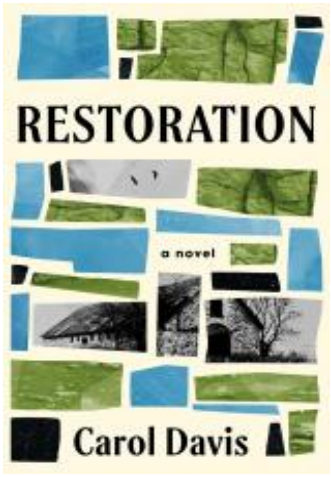
Restoration

by Carol Davis



About the Book

RESTORATION is an evocative novel about an American architect who travels to rural England to restore a centuries-old barn --- and finds herself rebuilding the fractured story of her own family.

It is 1984, and Risa Meier has built a successful life in San Francisco, far from the childhood losses and family secrets she has spent years trying to leave behind. But when her estranged mother unexpectedly reenters her life after nearly a decade of silence, old wounds resurface. As a series of personal tragedies force Risa to confront the past, she begins to question everything she thought she knew about her family, herself and the future she carefully planned.

Seeking distance and a fresh start, Risa accepts an opportunity in rural England, where she is tasked with restoring a centuries-old barn. As hidden histories emerge through letters, memories and the landscape itself, the restoration becomes more than a professional challenge. The deeper she digs into the building's past, the more she is forced to confront her own inheritance of grief, loss and longing.

Set between 1980s San Francisco and the English countryside, RESTORATION is a richly layered literary novel about mothers and daughters, family secrets, memory, and the transformative work of rebuilding a life.

Discussion Guide

Questions for Discussion

1. RESTORATION is both a literal and symbolic concept throughout the novel. Risa arrives in England to restore a centuries-old barn, but she is also confronting fractures within herself and her family history. How does the restoration of the barn parallel Risa's personal evolution? In what ways does repairing a structure differ from repairing a life? In what ways is it similar?

2. Early in the book, Risa discusses how gallery spaces shape the experience of viewing art, suggesting that architecture itself becomes part of the work. How does RESTORATION encourage readers to think differently about buildings, landscapes and the spaces we inhabit?

3. How would you describe the relationship between Risa and Helen? What misunderstandings, assumptions or silences shape their connection? How does Risa's understanding of her mother evolve over the course of the story?

4. Following a personal loss, Risa wonders if her ambivalence, confusion or uncertainty somehow contributed to what happened. How does the novel portray grief, self-blame and the stories people tell themselves after tragedy?

5. Risa often feels simultaneously drawn to and unsettled by places like the barn, the henge and the surrounding landscape. The novel incorporates moments of mysticism and spiritual resonance without fully explaining them. How did these elements affect your reading experience? Do you believe places can retain memory or emotional resonance?

6. As Risa uncovers new information about her mother's past, her understanding of Helen's life becomes more complicated. How does the novel explore the limited choices available to women in earlier generations? How does this information impact your perception of Helen?s choices and behavior in San Francisco?

7. Several characters suggest that understanding history requires imagination as much as evidence. How does the novel balance historical fact, family lore, memory and intuition? Are there moments when imagination reveals truths that documents alone cannot?

8. At certain points in the novel, Risa acts in ways that surprise even herself, creating tension between her sense of responsibility and her feeling of being carried along by forces she doesn't fully understand. How do you interpret these moments? To what extent do her actions reflect her broader search for identity and independence?

9. Dreams involving drifting, birds, ancient women and powerful symbolic imagery recur at important moments. How did you interpret these dream passages? Do you see them as psychological, spiritual, ancestral or something else entirely?

10. The novel is set during the 1980s, but many of its themes feel remarkably contemporary. How did the political and social backdrop --- including conversations around workers' rights, reproductive healthcare, mental health treatment and women's independence --- shape your understanding of the story? Did you find yourself drawing parallels to current events?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Inspired by Risa's observations about gallery spaces, visit a local museum, gallery or historic building together. Pay attention not only to the art but also to the architecture, lighting, wall placement and flow of the space. Discuss how the

physical environment shapes your experience of what you're seeing.

2. After seeing the barn for the first time, Risa recalls a line from Wordsworth's ?Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey?: ?once again do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, that on a wild secluded scene impress thoughts of more deep seclusion.? Have you ever encountered a building, landscape or place that left you feeling the way Risa feels about the barn --- a place that seemed to possess a history, energy or presence beyond what could be easily explained? Why do you think that place affected you so deeply? (If you have a photo, bring one.)

3. Music plays an important role throughout RESTORATION, helping establish mood, memory and emotional connection between characters. Before your meeting, create a playlist featuring songs, composers and artists referenced throughout the novel. As a group, discuss:

How does music function as a form of memory in the novel?
Did any particular song deepen your understanding of a character or scene?
Are there songs from your own life that immediately transport you to a specific time, place or relationship?
4. Research a local historic building, restoration project or adaptive reuse project. Discuss:

What aspects of the structure were preserved?
What was changed?
How do communities decide what is worth saving?

Author Bio

Carol Davis is a writer, researcher and archivist whose work explores history, memory, place and the stories embedded in the built environment. She serves on the boards of McSweeney's Literary Arts Foundation and Synergos Global Philanthropy Network, is a co-founder and former board member of The Brigid Alliance, and is involved in the global movement Mother?s Call.

She holds a BA in Art and Architectural History and an MFA in Writing and Literature. Her work has brought her in close collaboration with architects and art conservators in New York, Los Angeles and London. She and her husband divide their time between New York and The Berkshires. RESTORATION is her first novel.

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