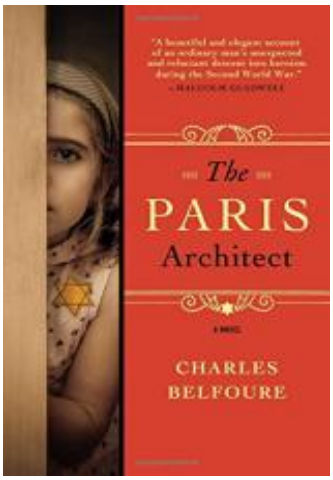
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The Paris Architect

by Charles Belfoure



About the Book

Like most gentiles in Nazi-occupied Paris, architect Lucien Bernard has little empathy for the Jews. So when a wealthy industrialist offers him a large sum of money to devise secret hiding places for Jews, Lucien struggles with the choice of risking his life for a cause he doesn?t really believe in. Ultimately he can?t resist the challenge and begins designing expertly concealed hiding spaces --- behind a painting, within a column or inside a drainpipe --- detecting possibilities invisible to the average eye. But when one of his clever hiding spaces fails horribly and the immense suffering of Jews becomes incredibly personal, he can no longer deny reality.

Written by an expert whose knowledge imbues every page, this story becomes more gripping with every life the architect tries to save.

Discussion Guide

1. Why did the majority of people in France refuse to help the Jews during World War II?

2. In the beginning of the novel, Lucien didn't care about what happened to the Jews. Discuss how his character evolved throughout the novel. How did your opinion of him change?

3. The Germans were disgusted that the French always informed on one another during the Occupation. Would you assume that this is a common war practice? Why? In what ways does war bring out the worst in people? In what ways does it bring out the best in people?

4. Many spouses abandoned each other because one was Jewish. What did you think when Juliette Trenet's husband left her? Is there any defense for what he did?

5. One reason Lucien helped Jews was to get architectural commissions from Manet. Did you agree with the French Resistance? Did Lucien?s love of design and the need to prove his talent cross the line into collaboration with the enemy?

6. Most fiction and films portray Nazis as monsters during World War II. Do you believe that some German military men secretly hated or doubted what they were doing? Does following the crowd make these men just as bad as those who carried out their duties without conscience?

7. Discuss the unusual relationship between Lucien and Herzog. Can two men from warring countries be friends?

8. Lucien was already taking an enormous risk by hiding Jews for Manet; why do you think he agreed to take in Pierre?

9. What was your impression of Father Jacques? What kind of role do you think faith plays throughout the novel?

10. Adele had no qualms about sleeping with the enemy. Why would she take such a risk?

11. Bette could have her pick of men but chose Lucien. Discuss what made him special in her eyes. What are the most important qualities you look for in a friend/significant other? Would you be willing to compromise on any of these qualities? For what?

12. If you were a Gentile living under the Nazis in World War II, do you think you would have had the courage to hide Jews? What consequences are you willing to face to help others?

13. It?s easy to say, knowing what we do about the horrors that occurred during WWII, that we would have helped Jews with nowhere to hide. How do you think you?d react if a similar situation occurred today? Do you think it?s even possible for a similar situation to occur in our day and age? Why? Why not?

14. Suppose you had been taken from your apartment by Captain Bruckner and lined up in the street. If you knew your life was about to end, what would you be thinking about?

15. If you were under the stairs in the Geibers? place during the Gestapo?s search, how would you have reacted?

16. Schlegal was disappointed that the people he tortured always talked. What do you think were the motivations behind someone who talked and someone who didn't? If you were in a situation where someone was trying to get information from you, what would be the final straw to make you talk?

Author Bio

Charles Belfoure is the international bestselling author of THE PARIS ARCHITECT, HOUSE OF THIEVES and THE FALLEN ARCHITECT, and is an architect by profession, with a specialty in historical preservation. He graduated from the Pratt Institute and Columbia University, has been a freelance writer for the *Baltimore Sun* and the *New York Times*, and has written several architectural histories.

Critical Praise

?Architect and debut author Belfoure?s portrayal of Vichy France is both disturbing and captivating, and his beautiful tale demonstrates that while human beings are capable of great atrocities, they have a capacity for tremendous acts of courage as well.?

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