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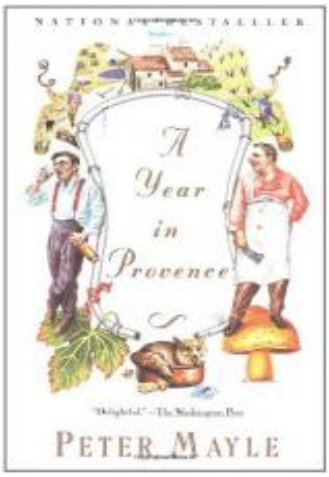
A Year in Provence

by Peter Mayle



About the Book

They had been there often as tourists. They had cherished the dream of someday living all year under the Provencal sun. And suddenly it happened.

Here is the month-by-month account of the charms and frustrations that Peter Mayle and his wife -- and their two large dogs -- experience their first year in the remote country of the Luberon restoring a two-centuries-old stone farmhouse that they bought on sight. From coping in January with the first mistral, which comes howling down from the Rhone Valley and wreaks havoc with the pipes, to dealing as the months go by with the disarming promises and procrastination of the local masons and plumbers, Peter Mayle delights us with his strategies for survival. He relishes the growing camaraderie with his country neighbors -- despite the rich, soupy, often impenetrable patois that threatens to separate them. He makes friends with boar hunters and truffle hunters, a man who eats foxes, and another who bites dentists; he discovers the secrets of handicapping racing goats and of disarming vipers. And he comes to dread the onslaught of tourists who disrupt his tranquillity.

In this often hilarious, seductive book Peter Mayle manages to transport us info all the earthy pleasures of Provencal life and lets us live vicariously in a tempo governed by seasons, not by days. George Lang, who was smitten, suggests: "Get a glass of marc, lean back in your most comfortable chair, and spend a delicious year in Provence."

Discussion Guide

1. How well did Mayle's frequent trips to Provence as a tourist prepare him for the reality of residing there? What were some of the initial surprises he and his wife encountered?

2. How does the form of the book--a month-by-month journal--enhance the immediacy of Mayle's observations and draw the reader into his experiences? How do the changing seasons mirror Mayle's own adjustment to his new environment?

3. Mayle writes that neighbors take on an importance in the country that they don't have in the city [p. 6]. How do his relationships with Faustin, Massot, Menicucci, and the other local workmen reflect this? Does the fact that Mayle is a foreigner influence the way he is treated? How do the men working on his house endear themselves to Mayle, despite his continuing frustrations with their casual attitude about completing the job?

4. Mayle notes there are "two areas of endeavor in which France leads the world--bureaucracy and gastronomy" [p. 23]. What particular characteristics of the French does Mayle bring to light in stories about the bureaucracy involved in buying the house, a car, insurance, and other necessities?

5. The influx of tourists begins in May and reaches a high point in August. How does his status as a resident affect Mayle's attitudes about friends and acquaintances who, as he himself once did, try to take in everything Provence has to offer during a short holiday? Does he learn things about himself and the life he has chosen by looking through the eyes of visitors? To what extent are his own perceptions influenced by his English upbringing?

6. How does the Mayles' party for the workmen and their wives, as well as their own Christmas dinner at a local restaurant, put the events of the year into context and serve as a coda to the book as a whole?

Author Bio

A recipient of the Légion d?Honneur from the French government for his cultural contributions, Peter Mayle has been living in Provence with his wife, Jennie, for more than 25 years.

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