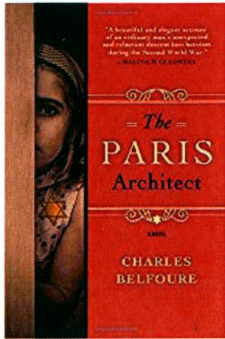


Paris Architect (Belfoure)

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The Paris Architect

Charles Belfoure, 2015

Sourcebooks

384 pp.

ISBN-13: 9781402294150

Summary

A beautiful and elegant account of an ordinary man's unexpected and reluctant descent into heroism during the second world war. —Malcolm Gladwell

In 1942 Paris, gifted architect Lucien Bernard accepts a commission that will bring him a great deal of money—and maybe get him killed. But if he's clever enough, he'll avoid any trouble.

All he has to do is design a secret hiding place for a wealthy Jewish man, a space so invisible that even the most determined German officer won't find it. He sorely needs the money, and outwitting the Nazis who have occupied his beloved city is a challenge he can't resist.

But when one of his hiding spaces fails horribly, and the problem of where to hide a Jew becomes terribly personal, Lucien can no longer ignore what's at stake. *The Paris Architect* asks us to consider what we owe each other, and just how far we'll go to make things right.

Written by an architect whose knowledge imbues every page, this story becomes more gripping with every soul hidden and every life saved. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—1954
- Where—suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland, USA
- Education—Pratt Institute; Columbia University
- Awards—from the Maryland Historical Trust (*see below*)
- Currently—lives in Westminster, Maryland

An architect and architectural consultant by profession, Charles Belfoure's area of specialty is historic preservation. He graduated from the Pratt Institute and Columbia University and has taught at Pratt, as well as at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland.

Belfoure has published several architectural histories, winning multiple awards from the Maryland Historical Trust, as well as a Graham Foundation Grant for research. Those works include *Monuments to Money: The Architecture of American Banks* (2011) and *Edmund Lind: Anglo-American Architect of Baltimore and the South* (2009). He is the co-author of *Niernsee & Neilson, Architects of Baltimore* (2006) and *The Baltimore Rowhouse* (2001).

The Paris Architect (2015) is Belfoure's foray into fiction.

In addition to his books, Belfoure has been a freelance writer for the *Baltimore Sun* and *New York Times*. He lives in Maryland. (*Adapted from the publisher and the author's website* (<http://www.charlesbelfoure.com>) .)

Book Reviews

All novelists are architects. But are all architects novelists? Charles Belfoure in his impressive debut seems to have brought us the best of both worlds. Here is a novel to read alongside the latest Alan Furst. I hope there will be more.

Alan Cheuse - NPR

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.

Library Journal

A thrilling debut novel of World War II Paris, from an author who's been called "an up and coming Ken Follett".... There's plenty of detail to interest architecture buffs, too.

Booklist

During the Nazi occupation of Paris, an architect devises ingenious hiding places for

Jews.... [A]rchitectural and historical details are closely rendered, while the characters are mostly sketchy stereotypes.... [S]trictly workmanlike prose. [But] as the tension increases, the most salient virtue of this effort—the expertly structured plot—emerges.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

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?

(Questions issued by the publisher.)

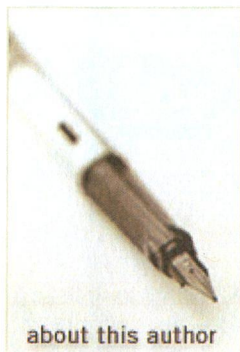
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About the Author

Full text biography:

Charles Belfoure



about this author

Birth Date : 1954

Place of Birth : United States, Maryland, Baltimore

Nationality: American

Occupation : Writer

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Awards
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Awards:

Maryland Historical Trust Heritage Book Award for outstanding books of scholarly or general interest, 2000, for *The Baltimore Rowhouse*.

Personal Information:

Born February 19, 1954; son of Charles W. Belfoure and Kristine Vetulani; married Robin Mirsky (divorced); married Gloria Mikolajczyk; children: Christopher (deceased), Julie. **Education:** Pratt Institute, B.Arch., 1983; Columbia University, M.S., 1993. **Memberships:** Association for Preservation Technology International, Columbia Alumni Association, Heritage Conservation/Historic Preservation of the Built Environment Network. **Addresses:** Home: Westminster, MD. **E-mail:** cbel4@theparisarchitect.com.

Career Information:

Writer, journalist, architect, novelist, architectural consultant, preservationist, and architectural historian. Charles Belfoure Architect & Historic Preservation Consultant, Westminster, MD, 1998--.

Writings:

- (With Mary Ellen Hayward) *The Baltimore Rowhouse*, foreword by James Marston Finch, Princeton Architectural Press (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Monuments to Money: The Architecture of American Banks*, McFarland (Jefferson, NC), 2005.
- (With Randolph W. Chalfant) *Niernsee and Neilson, Architects of Baltimore: Two Careers on the Edge of the Future*, introduction by Michael J. Lewis, Baltimore Architecture Foundation (Baltimore, MD), 2006.
- *Edmund G. Lind: Anglo-American Architect of Baltimore and the South*, Baltimore Architecture Foundation (Baltimore, MD), 2009.
- *The Paris Architect* (novel), Sourcebooks Landmark (Naperville, IL), 2013.
- *House of Thieves* (novel), Sourcebooks Landmark (Naperville, IL), 2015.

Contributor to newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*. Contributor to blogs, including *The Prosen People*.

Sidelights:

Writer, novelist, and architect Charles Belfoure is an architectural consultant, historic preservationist, and preservation consultant working out of Westminster, Maryland. He is owner and operator of his own consulting service, Charles Belfoure Architect & Historical Preservation Consultant, offering advice and technical services to clients interested in preserving and restoring historic structures. Belfoure attended the Pratt Institute, where he earned a B.Arch. in architecture, and Columbia University in the City of New York, where he obtained an M.S. degree in real estate development.

In his first book, *The Baltimore Rowhouse*, written with Mary Ellen Hayward, Belfoure examines the unique history and architecture of the rowhouse, a style of dwelling common to his native Baltimore. The authors carefully explore the historic significance and importance of the rowhouse in Baltimore and how this style of residence came to prominence in the city. They also look for answers to why the rowhouse persisted in Baltimore when it fell out of favor in other large American cities. Belfoure and Hayward trace 200 years of rowhouse history, from their origins as housing for immigrants to their current status as residences for wealthy Baltimore professionals. *The Baltimore Rowhouse* won the 2000 Maryland Historical Trust Heritage Book Award for outstanding books of scholarly or general interest.

Monuments to Money: The Architecture of American Banks contains Belfoure's detailed examination of the history and development of American bank architecture. Beginning in 1781, when the first bank was founded in America, Belfoure traces in detail the evolution of bank architecture and the social, political, and economic forces that helped shape the look and atmosphere of the country's financial institutions. He looks at architectural styles such as Neo-Classicism, Greek Revival, Classical Revival, and the Prairie School. He ties relevant architectural styles to the broader social and cultural context of their time, such as the rise of Modernism after World War II, and he also covers modern banks of the twenty-first century.

With this book, Belfoure presents a notable history of the "influence of depressions, panics, and government policies on bank architecture," commented a *Reference & Research Book News* contributor.

Belfoure's debut novel, *The Paris Architect*, uses his architectural and historical knowledge as background for a tale of suspense and human courage set during the Nazi occupation of France during World War II. Throughout the book, "Belfoure's characters are well-rounded and intricate," commented a *Publishers Weekly* writer. In 1942, the Germans have taken over Paris, much to the distress of Parisians such as Lucien Bernard, an architect. Bernard hates the occupiers, though he has little regard for the oppressed Jews of the city. With resources such as food and employment at critical lows, Bernard is desperate for a job to sustain himself. He accepts employment from a wealthy business owner who hires him to design undetectable hiding places where Jewish citizens can take refuge from the Nazis. These ingenious feats of design and architecture include a decorative column with an undetectable door and a staircase with a carefully concealed opening. Bernard thrives while performing this dangerous but highly satisfying work.

When an error in one of his designs leads to tragedy, Bernard is jolted into a new understanding of the importance of what he is doing. As he begins to better understand the plight of the Parisian Jews, he recognizes that he is becoming an important force in their life-or-death struggle for freedom. Surrounded by violence and potential betrayal, Bernard accepts a type of counter project, the design of a German factor that requires direct collaboration with a Nazi officer. Soon, Bernard faces the lethal reality of his double dealings, even as his hostility toward the Nazis grows into a desire to mete out revenge for the atrocities they have committed.

Belfoure's novel demonstrates that "human beings are capable of great atrocities," though they also "have a capacity for tremendous acts of courage" in dire circumstances, noted reviewer Vicki Briner in *Library Journal*. The *Publishers Weekly* contributor concluded: "Heart, reluctant heroism, and art blend together in this spine-chilling page-turner."

Set in New York during the late 1800s, *House of Thieves* follows architect John Cross. Crime boss James T. Kent strong-arms John into his service, and the protagonist provides Kent with blueprints and building plans. The documents he provides detail the layout of New York's wealthiest homes, allowing Kent's gang to rob the rich with impunity. If John does not cooperate, Kent will kill his son, but if John is found out, he will be sent to prison, and his entire family will be ruined. John is living a double life filled with lies, and it becomes even more complicated when his brother, a detective, begins investigating the very robberies that John has abetted. "The Cross family leads a privileged and comfortable

life," Belfoure told *Publishers Weekly* interviewer Nate Brown, "but it's a fragile privilege--one that's dependent upon reputation, behavior, and adherence to the rules. If you had one misstep and got yourself talked about, you could be completely ostracized by society and by your family. It's hard to imagine that today, when we all live so much more publicly."

Reviewers largely praised the tale, and *New York Journal of Books Online* correspondent D.R. Meredith felt that "Belfoure's narrative description of Gilded Age New York City in 1886 is as richly detailed as the ornately decorated homes of the wealthy. He evokes the sights, sounds, and even the smells of the city." Meredith added: "*House of Thieves* is a page-turning suspense novel with both dastardly characters and charming ones, a fascinating setting, and a mesmerizing story. One should not begin reading this book late in the evening unless loss of a night's sleep is not an issue." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic remarked that "despite some improbable situations," the story is "an entertaining excursion through Gilded Age New York with all the right architectural details." Kristin Downer, writing on the *Nerd Problems* Web site, was even more positive, asserting: "*House of Thieves* intrigued me from the start. Not only was it about murder, suspense, and mystery (my three favorite topics in a book), but it also gave a glimpse into the world of the late 1800's in New York. Charles Belfoure tell us a twisted story of family, sacrifice, and bad decisions surrounded a well-to-do family." In the words of a *Publishers Weekly* correspondent, *House of Thieves* is an "engrossing Gilded Age novel," and "Belfoure holds together each and every thread of the novel, resulting in a most memorable, evocative read."

Related Information:

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, July 1, 2013, Sarah Johnson, review of *The Paris Architect*, p. 44; August 1, 2015, Michele Leber, review of *House of Thieves*, p. 40.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, April 15, 2013, review of *The Paris Architect*; July 15, 2015, review of *House of Thieves*.
- *Lancaster Sunday News* (Lancaster, PA), "Author Charles Belfoure to Discuss *The Paris Architect* in Lititz," profile of Charles Belfoure.
- *Library Journal*, June 15, 2013, Vicki Briner, review of *The Paris Architect*, p. 78; June 15, 2015, Mara Bandy, review of *House of Thieves*, p. 71.
- *Publishers Weekly*, June 10, 2013, review of *The Paris Architect*, p. 47; June 1, 2015, review of *House of Thieves*, p. 38; July 27, 2015, Nate Brown, "Two Lives," p. 34.
- *Reference & Research Book News*, November, 2005, review of *Monuments to Money: The Architecture of American Banks*.
- *USA Today*, October 30, 2013, Jocelyn McClurg, "New Voices: Charles Belfoure and the *Paris Architect*," profile of Charles Belfoure.

ONLINE

- *Jewish Book Council Web site*, <http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/> (October 15, 2013), biography of Charles Belfoure.
- *Nerd Problems*, <http://www.nerdprobs.com/> (September 16, 2015), Kristin Downer, review of *House of Thieves*.
- *New York Journal of Books Online*, <http://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/> (June 4, 2016), D.R. Meredith, review of *House of Thieves*.
- *Paris Architect Web site*, <http://www.theparisarchitect.com> (January 2, 2014).*

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