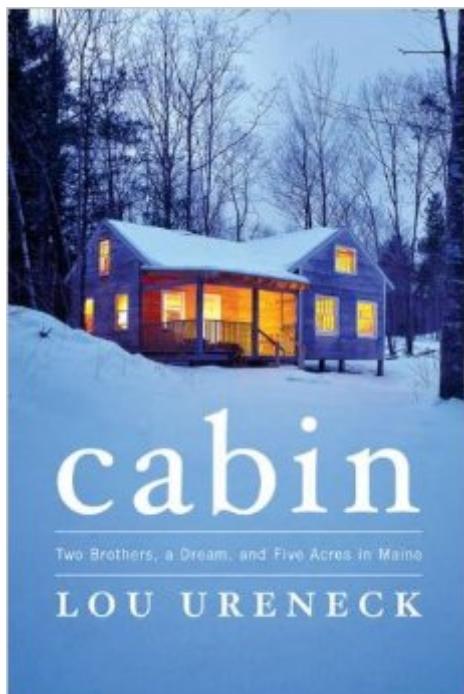


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Cabin: Two Brothers, A Dream, And Five Acres In Maine



Synopsis

Inspired by his From the Ground Up New York Times blog, a beautifully written memoir about building and brotherhood. Confronted with the disappointments and knockdowns that can come in middle age-job loss, the death of his mother, a health scare, a divorce-Lou Ureneck needed a project that would engage the better part of him and put him back in life's good graces. City-bound for a decade, Lou decided he needed to build a simple post-and-beam cabin in the woods. He bought five acres in the hills of western Maine and asked his younger brother, Paul, to help him. Twenty years earlier the brothers had built a house together. Now Lou saw working with Paul as a way to reconnect with their shared history and to rediscover his truest self. As the brothers-with the help of Paul's sons-undertake the challenging construction, nothing seems to go according to plan. But as they raise the cabin, Ureneck eloquently reveals his own evolving insights into the richness and complexity of family relationships, the healing power of nature, and the need to root oneself in a place one can call home. With its exploration of the satisfaction of building and of physical labor, Cabin will also appeal to readers of Robert Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Matthew Crawford's Shop Class as Soulcraft, and Tracy Kidder's House.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a really well written book. Lou weaves a fascinating tapestry intertwining fibers of our human condition along with the primal need to bond with 'place.' There is a simple elegance to his prose, "In a world that hadn't seemed entirely reliable or kind these past few years, the memories of the woods and waters of my boyhood were pleasurable, and the notion of the cabin, which I had been

entertaining, seemed a natural next step extension of them."Lou takes us along on his fascinating journey.

A few years ago, I started following Ureneck's Maine cabin blog after spotting an excerpt in the New York Times. From the comfort of my home, I was able to vicariously enjoy as Ureneck followed a dream and endeavored to build a cabin in the Maine woods with the help of his brother. I looked forward to the arrival of his book to learn more from this adventure. I was not disappointed,-- the book delivers the goods, and more. There is much to learn about the fundamentals of building the cabin and the Maine countryside. It is at times transcendent, as in Ureneck's descriptions of the Maine woods, and at times poignant, as in Ureneck's recounting of the rebuilding of his relationship with his brother and his family. Before beginning this venture, Ureneck admits that the loss of his mother and several other changes in his life had left him somewhat dispirited. Through his perseverance in staking out a place in the woods, Ureneck is able to offer an inspirational and practical remedy toward getting back on track. It is a testament to the reinvigorating power of nature and the strength of family.

I have read a lot of books about houses, about people building houses, designing houses, moving to the woods, living off grid, etc. The book was just ok. It's not as much about the cabin as about his childhood. There's a smattering about his relationship with his brother (book title "Two brothers, a dream...."), some bits about the history of the land, quite a bit (T.M.I.) about his nephews personal problems (I'd be surprised if they're still talking to him after airing their personal problems in public in the interest of ... why is it in the book?), his mother's character defects, his step-father's character defects, his own bouts of mental illness, and maybe half the book (a generous estimate) about building the cabin. He uses a lot of fluff to increase the number of pages but after the halfway mark, I got really tired of anything that wasn't about building the cabin. This book is compared to Tracy Kidder's House in the description. No. it's not like Tracy Kidder's House.

Disclosure: I am prone to rant and rave violently against the tidal wave of navel gazing memoirs which has swept over the US publishing industry in recent years. And Louis Ureneck is a repeat offender no less! So I would normally be predisposed to savage Cabin's introspection in my review. However, I too am the owner of a rustic cabin (in the Adirondacks) and I closely followed "From the Ground Up" (the author's NY Times blog on the subject). Moreover I willingly clicked on the "Buy" button knowing full well what I was getting into! Enough about me. In short, this was an excellent

book, which I read more or less at a single sitting. As a "gentleman cabin owner" I can't emphasize enough how much we hang on the experiences of others. Nowadays, when driving around, I find my eyes constantly drawn to foundations and roofs. "Mmm...cinder block piers". "Look how they routed the stovepipe out the cabin side not the roof". "Now there's a great idea for firewood storage". Etc., etc. Cabin is full of great details like this. I also really enjoyed Ureneck's observations regarding wildlife, local ecology, weather, geography, and regional history. However, I am rating this four stars, not five, in part for the reasons noted above, but mainly because I craved even more details on construction, including (especially) the mistakes. How was the well insulated for winter? Did he use heated sleeves? But what was the power source since the cabin is not connected to local power lines? And so forth. More along the lines of Dick Proenneke. Make no mistake. Anyone who dreams of building a cabin in the woods would profit from this book, which is written with honesty and humility, and is full of useful information. Especially for foundation builders ;-)

An absolutely wonderful book. Mr. Ureneck is truly skilled. "Cabin" is a book that would appeal to anyone who has a desire to get back to basics and reconnect with what is important. After following his New York Times blog "From the Ground Up", I anxiously awaited this book and felt as if I was standing with him on a cold New England morning as I strapped on my tool belt and prepared to do some good old fashioned manual labor. Sometimes what is hard on the hands is good for the soul. America needs more books like this. Bravo.

Given the book's subtitle, I expected it to be as much about the relationship between the author and his brother as between the author and his cabin and land. Not so. Ureneck remains self-absorbed throughout, even going so far as to avoid asking his brother what's wrong when the man is clearly troubled -- not just on one occasion, but day after day. (Ureneck justifies this by saying the cabin should be a place to escape troubles, not talk about them.) The author does mention his own personal problems, ones firmly in the past, but he passes over them quickly, whereas he goes on at length about the features and history of his land and its trees. Of course, there's nothing wrong with a book whose aim is simply to speak lyrically about nature and the building of a cabin--and as other reviews indicate, Urenick does this fairly well. (I say "fairly well" instead of "well" because the author relies on certain words a little too often, and there are a few grammatical errors in the book that alter the intended meaning.) But as I've said, I expected this book to show how the building of a cabin affected a sibling relationship (just as Sarahlee Lawrence's memoir *RIVER HOUSE* shows how the building of a log home affects a father/daughter relationship), and I don't want others to be as

blindsided as I was by CABIN's lack of emotional depth.

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