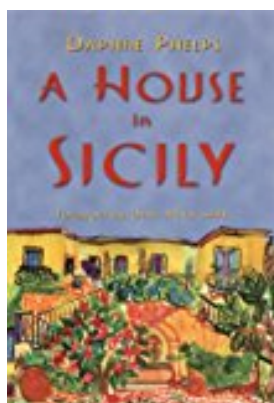


# [PDF] A House In Sicily

**Daphne Phelps, Denis Mack Smith - pdf download free book**

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**Books Details:**

Title: A House in Sicily  
Author: Daphne Phelps, Denis Mack Sm  
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**Description:**

"I had always been a bit of a maverick," writes Daphne Phelps, looking back on why--at the age of 34--when she unexpectedly inherited a grand house in Taormina, Sicily, she gave up her profession in London, left behind her ordered life with its museums, theater, family and friends, and embarked on a life-long adventure. Reading her intriguing memoir, one is glad Phelps chose the unconventional path: after inheriting her uncle's Casa Cuseni with its terraced gardens and staggering views of Mt. Etna, she struggles to make ends meet, but instead of selling the estate, opens its doors to a steady stream of paying guests and visitors--many of them artists, writers, and intellectuals.

Inheriting an estate in Italy in 1947 isn't quite like winning the lottery, it turns out. In short sketches, Phelps reminisces about stepping into small-town Sicilian life, war-weary, speaking very little Italian, and even more scandalous, being unmarried. With her no-nonsense British humor, she recounts the typical conversation with men, young and old:

"Are you married?"

"No."

"When are you going to get married?"

"*Chi lo sa--*who knows?"

And then, "Why aren't you married?"

Settling into daily life at Casa Cuseni, Phelps dons boots and digs into the garden, rolls up her sleeves and cleans the baroque carvings over the salon fireplace, and learns to manage the property and its full-time staff. As she points out in the book's conclusion, for more than 50 years now, house-related problems have kept her on her toes--those, and her amazingly devoted servant, cook, and even the local Mafia don, whom she all describes with more than a little condescension in a series of deft portraits. While Phelps's cynicism can be a bit hard to take when she's serving up her servants, she is, perhaps, at her best when telling stories about her famous houseguests: Bertrand Russell, Henry Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, even Roald Dahl. Some were charming, some were horrid. But the visitors came from 26 countries, with friends introducing their friends. Around the dining room table and in this volume Phelps has mixed people who in "normal life would be unlikely to meet." It is this Sicilian menagerie--anchored to a singular place and time, and viewed through a British prism--that makes Phelps's life story so worth the telling. --*Kimberly Brown*

**From Publishers Weekly** In this charming memoir, Phelps recounts how she indirectly inherited a villa in Taormina shortly after the end of WWII. Her uncle, who had originally purchased the land and built the house, left no will, so the villa went to the author's aunt. Realizing that her aunt had no interest in the property, Phelps, who is British, headed to Sicily with the intent to sell but ended up as enchanted with the area and the property as her uncle had been. She turned the house into an inn in order to make enough money to maintain it, and later she received many famous guests, Roald Dahl among them. Phelps is clearly well integrated into Taormina after 50 years, and she lovingly and teasingly depicts her companions. Concetta, who has worked for the author for three decades, is a no-nonsense woman who initially insisted she couldn't serve as cook because she knew how to prepare only Sicilian food. Phelps, who was a social worker before moving to Italy, has a keen anthropological eye. Her portrait of a local Mafia don, who has no phone but instructs her simply to phone his village's main operator if she needs to reach him, manages to be both humorous and serious. Another chapter on the local police forces *Acarabinieri*, the sanitary police, the financial police, etc. *A* captures Italy's bureaucracy beautifully. Since chapters are organized by topic, occasionally the date of certain events is unclear, but otherwise, this is a refreshing look at a place that so many have stereotyped and so few have known as well as Phelps. Illustrations. not seen by PW. (Sept.)

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