

House & Home

by Kathleen McCleary

Reading Group Guide

1. Places, from Ellen's house to Portland itself, play a key role in the book and almost seem like actual characters. Was Ellen's love for the house understandable, or did she put too much importance into the meaning of a place? What do you really give up when you leave a place you love, whether it's a house or a town or a neighborhood? Why do we invest so much in our physical environment?
2. Ellen's definition of "home" changes by the end of the novel. What really makes a house a home?
3. To what extent do people have to give up their dreams once they're married? Whether owning a winery, inventing a new product, or living in one's dream house/home, each of the characters in the book struggled to articulate their own dream and live it, while still trying to consider the needs of spouses and children. Which characters achieved their dreams by the end? Were the sacrifices involved fair, or too much?
4. Ellen is a very self-sufficient character. Is there anything "out of balance" in Ellen's relationships with her friends and/or family members?
5. What is the definition of being heroic? Who was the hero in the book?
6. Some people love the idea of a fresh start and feel the need to move every few years. Why is Jordan's approach to her own move so different from Ellen's? Whose approach is more realistic? More common? Why?
7. Being vulnerable can open one up to relationships (or even just the thought of relationships) that otherwise might be unthinkable when our reserves are stronger. Why are Ellen and Jeffrey drawn to each other? Is their mutual attraction based only on their situations? Why or why not?
8. Could Jordan and the heroine ever have been friends, if they met under different circumstances?
9. Given that Ellen seems to be a woman who "has it all" in so many respects, what is it that is really driving her to divorce?
10. Where do you think Ellen gets her strength? Why would a woman like Ellen engage in risky behaviors such as attempted arson and romance with a married man?
11. Have you ever gone back to a home you loved and left? Was it what you expected?
12. Ellen has trouble understanding Jordan's fascination with where she went to college. Are there real regional differences like this across the U.S.? Or was Jordan's attitude more a function of her own personality than her east coast upbringing?