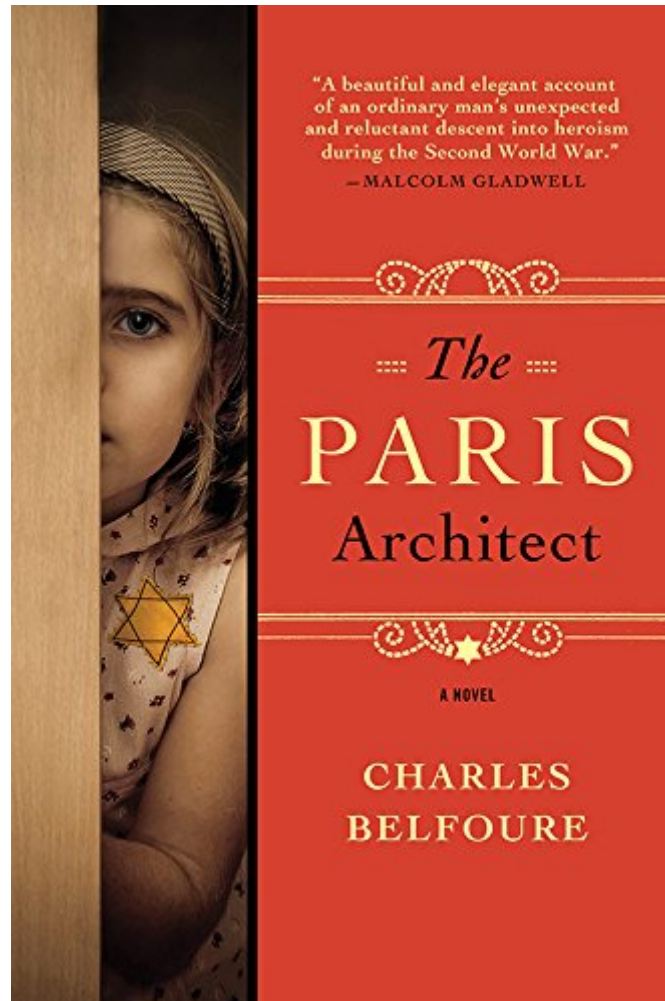




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# The Paris Architect: A Novel



## Synopsis

The New York Times bestseller "A beautiful and elegant account of an ordinary man's unexpected and reluctant descent into heroism during the second world war." --Malcolm Gladwell  
A thrilling debut novel of World War II Paris, from an author who's been called "an up and coming Ken Follett." (Booklist)  
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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A Conversation with Charles Belfoure   How did you first become interested in writing?   When I went back to Columbia University, I had to write a thesis for my master's degree. I found that I really enjoyed doing the research and writing the thesis. I'd never written a word before that. So I decided that I'd like to write a book. I co-authored *The Baltimore Rowhouse* then went on to write three more books on architectural history on my own. I also became a freelance writer for the *Baltimore Sun* and *New York Times*, which I didn't enjoy as much as writing the books.   Why did you start writing fiction?   Once I had some non-fiction experience under my belt, I thought I'd try fiction. John Grisham was my inspiration: a real-life attorney who wrote crime novels based on the legal world. I was a real-life architect who could write fiction based on architecture. And I always admired writers who had dual careers, such as Wallace Stevens who was a lawyer, Somerset Maugham and William Carlos Williams who were doctors.   Who are your favorite fiction writers?   There's just one, Anne Tyler. She's superb at observing human behavior and emotions. And her novels are based in Baltimore, my hometown, so I enjoy identifying the Baltimore references and geography in her books.   What was your inspiration for *The Paris Architect*?   For *The Paris Architect*, I transposed a real life historical event to a different time. During the reign of Elizabeth I, Catholicism was repressed, and the saying of mass was outlawed. But priests throughout England refused to obey and continued to worship in secret in manor houses. As a precaution, carpenters designed and constructed "priest holes" for them to hide in if the house was discovered. (If caught, the priests as well as the people who hid them would be tortured and executed.) When the Queen's soldiers raided a suspected house, they would look for days and never find the priests who were hiding under their noses. Using Occupied Paris during World War II as my setting, I turned the Elizabethan age carpenter into a gentile architect who designs temporary hiding places for Jews escaping the Nazis.   The other inspiration would be that of my mother's experience during World War II. After Germany defeated Poland in 1939, many Poles were forced into labor camps to work produce war material for the Germans. My mother wasn't Jewish but she and hundreds of thousands of gentile Poles had to work in factories under horrific conditions, functioning basically as slaves. She was working in a factory that made chewing tobacco for German soldiers. One day, a German supervisor discovered she could speak German and French and found her a job as a translator at the factory in Nordhausen, Germany where the V-2 rockets were being produced. She worked as a housekeeper and translator for the contractor who constructed tunnels inside the Harz Mountains, where the rockets were assembled. She lived with the contractor's family in relative comfort while a few hundred meters away thousands died building rockets. The German supervisor's one

act of kindness saved her. People can't survive terrible times without help from others. So I wanted to include those kinds of behavior in the book. What research did you do before writing the book? I studied as much as I could about life in Paris during World War II. The best reference was Jean-Paul Sartre's essay "Paris Under the Occupation." What's the process you use in writing a book? I do it the way a building is constructed. First, I build the foundation and a structural skeleton, which is the basic plot structure of the novel. Then in layers I flesh out the structure, adding details that give it description and depth. The last layer would be tiny details like the design of a handrail or the door handle on the front doorway in a building. Who were your favorite characters in the book? Aside from Lucien, the architect, it would be Father Jacques. It's a little known fact that a lot of Catholic priests in France were arrested and deported for helping Jews, especially children. I wanted to portray a really brave person committed to helping his fellow man. The scene with Father Jacques being interrogated by the Gestapo colonel is probably my favorite. He isn't scared or intimidated by the Gestapo in the least and stands up to them. He knows he's done the right thing by helping the children and isn't afraid to die for it.

This is a "must read" for historical context and the events during WWII from the perspectives of individuals in France directly and peripherally involved, both Germans and French. The book takes the reader through the characters' decisions based on their personal, professional and patriotic motivations, prompting one to search his or her own conscience if faced with similar circumstances. It is at many times a study of egos of men and women who interact in settings defined by the War in ways that they might not otherwise, given their backgrounds and personalities. The only drawback as a literary work is the predictability of the ending that proves simplistic, in contrast to the intense complexities presented from the beginning up to that point.

There seems to be an increase in popularity in historical fiction about France under the Nazis. I bought this as an ebook and added the audio edition, which is how I ultimately read it. The narrator did a good job of employing different accents for all the French and German characters. The author did an excellent job on developing the character of Lucien Bernard from a totally self-absorbed individual only interested in showing his brilliance as an architect to someone who developed compassion and courage as he used his craft to save Jews in hiding from the Nazis. Parts of it were horrifying in the description of antisemitism and torture, but the message was ultimately hopeful. I did think the ending was a little abrupt, but all in all, an absorbing read.

An interesting story set in France when occupied by the Germans in WWII. The main story-line that follows the architect on Paris through his designs and the interactions between the fine of line of satisfying the Germans but rescuing the Jews that are hunted. It was a bit slow in the middle but intriguing to the end. There are also several other story-lines that intersect with the architect, like the ones he saved with his unique hidden designs, but was disappointed in not knowing how their story-lines ended...did they escape or were they prosecuted. you don't ever know.

Paris, 1942. The Nazis have occupied the city and put everyone at risk, particularly its Jewish population. Parisian architect Lucien Bernard is unable to find work, forced to live off his wife's meager inheritance. Improbably, he is approached by a wealthy French builder with a proposition. If he will design a hiding place for a rich Jew, he will earn a large commission. Moreover, completing the job will earn him a job building a factory for the builder, a factory for the war production of the Nazis. It is the perfect moral dilemma. Can you justify doing wrong as part doing good? The stakes are huge. His collaboration with the Nazis marks him as a potential target for the French Resistance. And discovery of his work for the Jews will certainly bring the Gestapo to his door. Each project brings Lucien further toward tragedy, but also toward redemption, as he understands what is really important in life. This is a somewhat unusual twist on a common tale, one with a character who is much more sympathetic than at first sight.

It's too bad the storytelling here is so unfocused because the general premise could have inspired a good suspense novel about a conflicted French architect who gets into a cat and mouse game with the Gestapo. Instead, the tale is extremely repetitive in structure and content. Often it reads like a basic tutorial about what life was like under NAZI occupation. Topped off with revisionist history about the allegedly courageous nature of the French people under the Germans and the budding suspense novel here is extinguished before it can ever come together,

I love Paris so the book had a head start with me. I guess I wouldn't have started the Amsterdam architect or the Poughkeepsie architect. World War II has a continuing fascination though except for shortages, roundups, reprisals and war work by the architect, you don't see it so much. I did like the perspective provided by an architect who has the main character doing the work of an architect. This is mostly about saving Jews and collaborating with Germans to keep working. The story flows and certainly kept my attention but most characters were cliches. Many were not fully developed.

Ultimately I am left thinking there is a lot of improbability to accept in reading the book. All of that being said, I liked the book. I am glad I spent the time reading it. I plan to see what else the author has written.

I really enjoy this book. Lucien is not your typical "nice guy" so it was fun reading about the things that happen and how he finds himself. I surprisingly fell in love with his character. The only negative about this book is it didn't really tie up the other characters in the end. I have so many questions...

Obviously WWII fiction is plentiful right now, and I'd really enjoyed both *The Nightingale* and *All the Light We Cannot See: A Novel* so was looking forward to this novel to get yet another perspective on the French War Experience. I can't say I regret reading the book - Lucien is a very believable character, and it does make one think... BUT there were so many elements that I didn't care for. The author uses very strong, crude language in several places. I understand that he's trying to convey just how difficult the situations were, but it didn't flow with the rest of the book. And well, frankly it's obvious it was written by a man based on some of the descriptions/phrasing. My other complaint is that the character development wasn't handled well (there were random snippets about various people, but then they were in just one more scene), and the pacing was very uneven. My biggest complaint, though, was the ending. After all the high drama, the final resolution is very fast and way too easy. Seriously, if you're trying to craft an excellent novel, PLEASE include the ending in that effort!

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