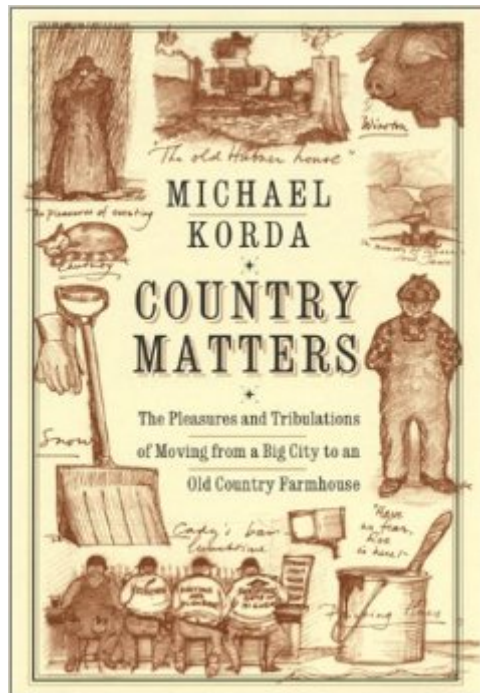


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Country Matters: The Pleasures And Tribulations Of Moving From A Big City To An Old Country Farmhouse



Synopsis

With his inimitable sense of humor and storytelling talent, New York Times bestselling author Michael Korda brings us this charming, hilarious, self-deprecating memoir of a city couple's new life in the country. At once entertaining, canny, and moving, *Country Matters* does for Dutchess County, New York, what *Under the Tuscan Sun* did for Tuscany. This witty memoir, replete with Korda's own line drawings, reads like a novel, as it chronicles the author's transformation from city slicker to full-time country gentleman, complete with tractors, horses, and a leaking roof. When he decides to take up residence in an eighteenth-century farmhouse in Dutchess County, ninety miles north of New York City, Korda discovers what country life is really like: Owning pigs, more than owning horses, even more than owning the actual house, firmly anchored the Kordas as residents in the eyes of their Pleasant Valley neighbors. You may own your land, but without concertina barbed wire, or the 82nd Airborne on patrol, it's impossible to keep people off it! It's possible to line up major household repairs over a tuna melt sandwich. And everyone in the area is fully aware that Michael "don't know shit about septic." The locals are not particularly quick to accept these outsiders, and the couple's earliest interactions with their new neighbors provide constant entertainment, particularly when the Kordas discover that hunting season is a year-round event -- right on their own land! From their closest neighbors, mostly dairy farmers, to their unforgettable caretaker Harold Roe -- whose motto regarding the local flora is "Whack it all back!" -- the residents of Pleasant Valley eventually come to realize that the Kordas are more than mere weekenders. Sure to have readers in stitches, this is a book that has universal appeal for all who have ever dreamed of owning that perfect little place to escape to up in the country, or, more boldly, have done it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I found this book immensely entertaining. I am delighted that Mr. Korda found the people in the country as enigmatic as I am sure they found him over the years. Pigs as pets, a Porsche and a monstrosity of a building for the horses could only have had the locals in stitches down at Cady's Bar. Mr. Korda is to be commended for the way he adeptly sidesteps local gossip and remains focused on those who work for him, creating a tale of country cunning written by the very man signing the checks. That his humor fails in certain parts of the text is understandable given the differences between the people of the town and himself. His irritation seems to increase every time someone refers to his house as the "old Hewlett farm" or the "old Hubner place". This is common in small towns, but probably not familiar to Mr. Korda. One need only to ask directions from a local to find out they call roads by names on signs long ago taken down and designate turns by where so and so kept his cows a while back. In his irritation, the author confuses the story therefore; I will take the liberty of clarifying it. First, the house Mr. Korda bought was never part of the Hewlett farm. The Hewlett family now owns a much larger farm in Northwestern New York. There are no trailers. In Pleasant Valley the "old Hewlett" farmhouse is the house two doors down from the "old Hubner place", or if Mr. Korda insists the "Korda place". The book alternates between disdain for the people of the town and subsequently trying to impress them. The author fluctuates between fencing them out, and waiting for them enamored of him. They are a tough crowd. As a former local, born and raised in Pleasant Valley, but living closer to the city, I can agree without hesitation that it is no Walden pond. It is full of people. People who do not post their land, or drive Porsches without waving, or chat about themselves at length. Thoreau did not buy Walden pond; he left it, undisturbed. Loons, ants and all.

The New York Times sparked my interest in this age-old literary subject--city dweller finds renewal in the country, with all the highs and lows and informative or interesting tidbits of making the transition. My interest in this subject goes all the way back to Crazy-White-Man (Sha-ga-na-she Wa-du-kee) by Richard Morenus, published by Rand McNally and Co. in 1952. So, I am not a newcomer to the genre. In fact, my wife and I recently put the finishing touches on a 3-year restoration of a century-old lodge on an island in Maine. Therefore, I do not place a low rating on this book without careful thought and regret. Usually, one thinks that if the Times views a book as newsworthy, it will be a bit special. In this case, I think it is Korda's professional connections in the

publishing industry (and not the merit of the piece) which earned the publicity, and possibly the initial printing. Korda would like the reader to believe that he is about to introduce them to the quaint, evolutionary transition of a (very, very sophisticated) city couple and a country estate from strangers to partners, each helped to reach the synergy by a cast of colorful local citizens with special skills and memorable characters. The book fails, however, to continue its early, promising pace, and eventually trails off into a series of random recollections, failing to develop the supporting characters in favor of repetitive, gratuitous references to Mrs. Korda's achievements as a horsewoman, and Mr. Korda's irrelevant pride in having read the classics. In the end, the country life which Mr. Korda portrays seems as shallow and trite as the city life he almost left behind. He is more often a disconnected observer than influential participant, and leaves the reader wondering whether, for the Kordas, the country really matters.

...who finished this book thinking that Korda was a pompous twit with more money than good manners. His condescending observations of his neighbors left me irritated time and time again, as well as the name dropping and implied superiority of himself vs. the "lowly" country folk. If you discounted the snide comments, the first part of the book was pretty interesting. However, the last 4 chapters became rambling and could have been condensed into one chapter. It was great reading the reviews from the Hewitts on this forum. It made me remember that there are ALWAYS two sides to every story, and that Mr. Korda took some literary license in his book.

I liked the book. I really enjoyed reading it. I do think that some of the criticism noted here is expected; however, it depends on what side of the story you are reading from. I am reading from the side of Mr. Korda. We, too, have a second home in New Hampshire. We are called, among other things, 'flatlanders' and 'yuppies'. (We live outside of Boston) We have many quirky folks in our small town in NH. I have come to love and admire them all. If I wrote about them, you might get the sense that I, too, felt above them in some way. Not true. I am in awe of them. They are the salt of the earth. They know who they are and they follow their own paths. Not like here in suburbia, where everything seems homogenized. They are much more colorful, much more interesting, know a lot about a lot and have oodles of common sense. They take care of each other, know a lot about each other and reach out to one another. Much different from the affluent suburbs where no one really knows anybody, they just know what each other has so they can make sure that they can one-up them all the time. It is not very neighborly. In the country, they may do that to some degree, but not as much. Maybe someone might have a bigger tractor or a better snowmobile. But that is about it.

They are simply kinder people. We would like to live there full-time, but jobs keep us nearer to the city. But we escape there as often as possible. It, too, is considered to be on the "wrong side of the tracks", but that is what makes it so special. I do believe that Mr. Korda feels the same way, too. It may not have come across that way, but I felt it as I read it. Sometimes we read more into things than are really there.

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