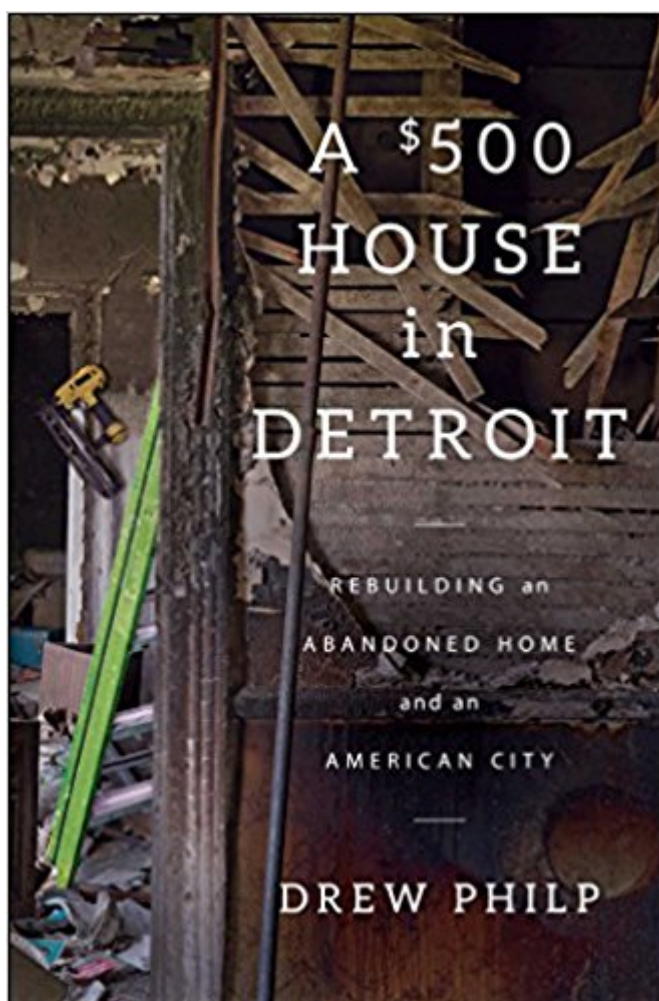


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# A \$500 House In Detroit: Rebuilding An Abandoned Home And An American City



## Synopsis

A young college grad buys a house in Detroit for \$500 and attempts to restore it—and his new neighborhood—to its original glory in this “deeply felt, sharply observed personal quest to create meaning and community out of the fallen” (Kirkus Reviews, starred review). Drew Philp, an idealistic college student from a working-class Michigan family, decides to live where he can make a difference. He sets his sights on Detroit, the failed metropolis of abandoned buildings, widespread poverty, and rampant crime. Arriving with no job, no friends, and no money, Philp buys a ramshackle house for five hundred dollars in the east side neighborhood known as Poletown. The roomy Queen Anne he now owns is little more than a clapboard shell on a crumbling brick foundation, missing windows, heat, water, electricity, and a functional roof. *A \$500 House in Detroit* is Philp’s raw and earnest account of rebuilding everything but the frame of his house, nail by nail and room by room. “Philp is a great storyteller [and his] engrossing tale is also of a young man finding his footing in the city, the country, and his own generation. We witness his concept of Detroit shift, expand, and evolve as his plan to save the city gives way to a life forged from political meaning, personal connection, and collective purpose. As he assimilates into the community of Detroiters around him, Philp guides readers through the city’s vibrant history and engages in urgent conversations about gentrification, racial tensions, and class warfare. Part social history, part brash generational statement, part comeback story, *A \$500 House in Detroit* “shines [in its depiction of] the radical neighborliness of ordinary people in desperate circumstances” (Publishers Weekly). This is an unforgettable, intimate account of the tentative revival of an American city and a glimpse at a new way forward for generations to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In this impassioned memoir, a young man finds a community flourishing in a city so depopulated that houses are worth less than a used Chevy. Philp ably captures the frontier feel of Detroit as he laboriously rehabs his ruined house from foundation to roof. His homebuilding narrative is engrossing. The book shines [in its depiction of] the radical neighborliness of ordinary people in desperate circumstances.

**Publishers Weekly** "[Philp] quickly becomes an involved resident, using creativity, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and positive thinking to create a place for himself in a depressed city highly recommended for general readers interested in the history and resurgence of Detroit and other U.S. cities.

**Library Journal** "Engrossing Philp is a great storyteller, and he has done a good job of documenting his struggles to carve out a home. It's also easy to see why he intends to stay.

**Booklist** "[A] deeply felt, sharply observed personal quest to create meaning and community out of the fallen city's cinders of racism and consumerism and escape. Philp ably outlines the broad issues of race and class in the city, but it is the warmth and liveliness of his storytelling that will win many readers. A standout in the Detroit rehab genre.

**Kirkus Reviews**, starred review "Lots of young bohemian types are fascinated by Detroit's land of the fabled \$500 house! but few take the plunge as headily as Drew Philp did, not only buying his own place but renovating it from the inside out, getting to know the neighbors, and learning about one of America's most fascinating cities as only a true resident can. Philp writes about his experience with sensitivity, humility and humor, and his voice is a necessary addition to the literature of the Motor City.

**Mark Binelli**, author of *Detroit City is the Place to Be* "Downright eloquent and deeply moving. Beyond the sheer, compelling force of Philp's writing, his account is insistently honest and full of insight. No shortcuts. No unrealistic fantasies. No pretenses of the sort that made my nerves twitch before I gave up on the literature of Nightmare Detroit. Philp the 23-year-old kid comes alive convincingly, in all of his confused but determined effort to rebuild a house and sink roots. He captures the city in all of its horrors and hopes, contradictions and blind faith.

**Frank Viviano**, eight-time Pulitzer Prize-nominee, and *National Geographic* writer since 2001 "An important

and powerful memoir that looks at the struggles and great efforts being spent on breathing life into a decayed city, and delves into the complicated and diverse people trying to carve out better futures. *New York Journal of Books* "A fascinating inside look". Philp writes with exuberance and sincerity....Inspiring. *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

Drew Philp's work has been published both nationally and internationally and has appeared in publications, including BuzzFeed, The Detroit Free Press, MetroTimes, Corp! Magazine, the Bakersfield Californian, and the Michigan Daily. He lives in Detroit with his dog, Gratiot. *A \$500 House in Detroit* is his first book.

Being a lifelong Detroit native, this book really brings to life the trial, blight and macabre fascination the country has with Detroit. The rest of the country views Detroit as a violent hellhole, and there is a lot of truth to that. But what is missing from the viewpoint, is the other side of Detroit: the decent, hard-working, determined people who call it home. Living in Detroit is not for the faint-hearted, which is why Drew Philp's experience is unique and compelling. Sure, at times his naiveté occasionally clouds his judgment. He is a guy from a small-town in rural Michigan, educated at the fairly prestigious (but equally pretentious) University of Michigan. His time living in an impoverished portion of the city is wrought with new life experiences, different both in what he expected, and in what he was prepared for. His story, though, is not one of idealism or even self-congratulatory braggadocio. It is a story of a collapsing urban center, and an idealistic young man who not only wanted a cheap place to live, but to become one of a community... a community different than the one he grew up in, or the one he was educated in. The book is a lot of stories. Stories about building a roof, or trying to get heat, electricity and plumbing. But it is also so much more. It is about understanding yourself, your neighbors and your local government. As he nears completion of his house, Philp himself grows. Gone are those stereotypes he showed up with, replaced with respect for the people of Detroit, as well as self-respect. This is the kind of a book you can read in one sitting, because Philp's ability to tell a story keeps you turning page after page. His heartfelt honesty and determination are inspirational, and it shows Detroit in a light that no one outside of Detroit ever sees.

An interesting memoir of a man who moves to Detroit. In the process of re-building a house (and his little corner of a city) he learns about life on the edge, his values and how to apply them in a complex world. A great story about the power of community.

This was a tremendously interesting book. I felt like I got to know and care deeply about Detroit as a city as well as the author and what he was trying to understand or think about in the situation that he chose to purchase and rehabilitate his home in a place where most people had forgotten the residents and services that most of Detroit enjoys. I love books about renewal and this was certainly a fantastic book about renewal. Recommend this for a read for sure.

An incredible memoir! I loved every page. A completely real and raw book that is a true page-turner. The story-line reads so smooth it is hard to believe this isn't fiction, but, in fact, a real-life account of an amazing struggle to accomplish a goal the author demands he finish. Growing up outside of Detroit myself, I believe the author does an excellent job of depicting the middle of Detroit as a way to, "get out of America by going into its deepest regions." From describing a city constantly burning down, to the capitalistic parties only interested in profiting from Detroit's misfortune, to describing the story of true Detroiters whose voice is so often never heard, Philp does an excellent job of telling his story of rebuilding his house throughout this turbid atmosphere. A must read. Buy this book!

Drew has done something a lot of us dream of doing or would never have the guts to pursue. A really inspiring and thoughtful memoir that delves into the history of Detroit, segregation and the future of the city. I appreciate that Drew is very thoughtful of his privilege and wants to invest locally in the right way that doesn't displace current residents. Highly recommend this book for anyone who is interested in Detroit.

Absolutely awesome---if you, as I do, love house memoirs this is the book for you!! VERY well written with a wonderful ending that I promise will make you cry--in a good way. I hope the author will someday gift us with a sequel. Would love to hear what happens next.

Remarkable. This book is highly entertaining to read-- clever, witty, a page turner. But even better, the book is genuinely inspiring and provocative. The discussion of race, class, and personal efficacy is wise, unsettling, and profound. The author traces a journey of idealism, despair, courage, and morality. An unusual book that I will not forget-- kinda wonderful!

The way that Mr Philp weaves the story of his own development with the city of Detroit and it's myriad of racial, social, educational, and economic issues captured and caught my attention. This is

very recent history that continues to develop, and should inform our decisions as a nation. It's a compelling read, and I recommend this book.

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