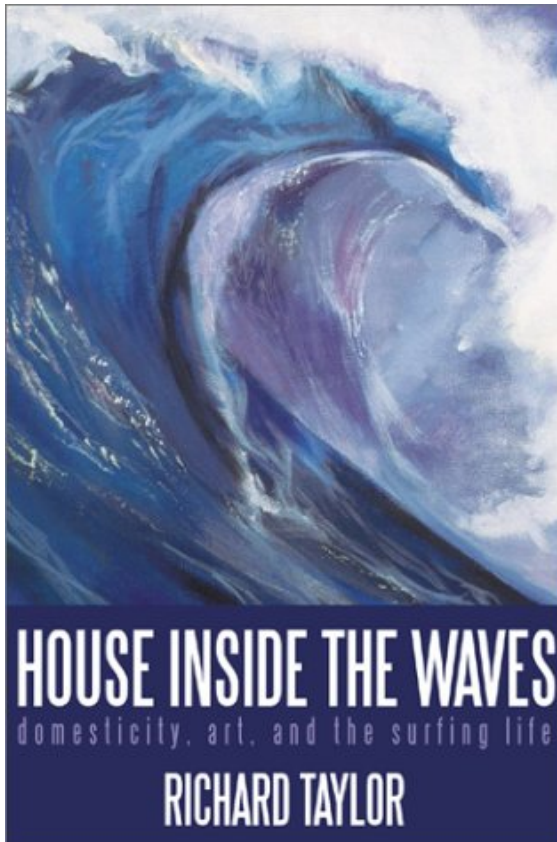


## HOUSE INSIDE THE WAVES: Domesticity, Art and the Surfing Life

Reviewed by Susannah Heath-Eves  
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If Richard Taylor's latest travel memoir, *House Inside the Waves: Domesticity, Art, and the Surfing Life*, were a painting, it would be a mixed media on canvas. On it one would find a glimpse of Taylor's soul made up of snapshots of Taylor's friends and family from the past, passages torn from literary classics, frangipani and jasmine blossoms (still fragrant), a recipe, colonial blood-letting, coral with his own blood on it, a hand-carved tiki, Sex Wax from his surf board, a shark's tooth, a clothes pin, the Beatles' *The White Album*, a Speedo, a Gauguin masterpiece and a Barbie Doll. All of these would be sprawled across an image of Taylor's view of the Coral Sea from his writing desk. *House Inside the*

*Waves* is a bittersweet meditation on "joie de vivre" as Taylor tries to make the best of a midlife crisis.

In his attempt to escape the daily humdrum of suburban existence, and only a month after the death of his sister and nephew in a house fire in Chelsea, Taylor and his family trade homes with an Australian couple for a year on a teaching exchange that Taylor's wife, Dale, has accepted. Amidst the medley of thoughts that entwine the story like the veins and arteries that feed and clean a body, *House Inside the Waves* follows Taylor's daily accounts of parenting, house duties, socializing and surfing, as he ventures on a journey of self discovery and soul-enrichment.

In an interview about his book, Taylor explains, "I had always wanted to sit by a window overlooking the sea and write a book about the Big Mystery." And this is precisely what he does - somewhere between building a Barbie mansion and stroking his way through a 2.5 kilometre open water swim along Byron Bay's shoreline.

In *House Inside the Waves*, history buffs will appreciate the information on pre- and post-colonial Australia, and the impact of European settlers on the "five hundred tribes" of aborigines. The Canadian Prisoners of War in Hong Kong are also remembered in a brief account of the Japanese "coup de grace" on the Kowloon waterfront during World War Two. We also learn about mainstream Australian culture as we watch Taylor at barbecues and hitchhiking to local surf spots.

Born in 1953 and raised in Ottawa, Taylor spent his childhood in land-locked suburbia. But he did most of his summers growing up at a cottage on the Ottawa River in Norway Bay, Quebec, where he vacationed with his friends and family. Amidst the highs and lows of childhood and adolescence, his cottage days formed a creature of the water; one who felt most at home when he wasn't bound by the limitations of gravity. Taylor completed high school, and a year at Simon Fraser University, and then the young romantic b-lined it for Hawaii and discovered an obsession with surfing. After graduating in 1976 with a degree in Psychology from Carleton University and marrying Dale, Taylor continued his life of travel, surfing and writing.

Taylor's works have been published for over 20 years, starting with *Last Resort*, a collection of prose poems. He changed his genre to short stories in *Tender Only to One* (1984) and then published his first novel, *Cartoon Woods*, in 1988. He contributed to the travel anthology, *Literary Trips: Following in the Footsteps of Fame*, in 2000 with Bruce Chatwin in Australia. And in 2001 he wrote *Robert Louis Stevenson's Dream of Islands*, for *Literary Trips II*. Over the years he has been writing book reviews and feature articles for newspapers and magazines, using the same relaxed pace and conversational tone as in *House Inside the Waves*. Two and a half years after returning from the yearlong exchange, he was sent back to the "Land Down Under" by The Ottawa Citizen to write a feature on the 2000 summer Olympics in Sydney. At present Taylor is a sessional lecturer at Carleton University.