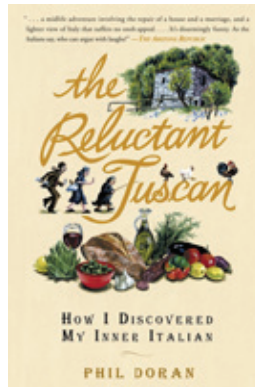


## A READING GROUP GUIDE to



### ***THE RELUCTANT TUSCAN*** by Phil Doran

#### **About the Book:**

After twenty-five years in Hollywood writing and producing such popular television shows as *The Wonder Years* and *Who's The Boss?*, Phil Doran was feeling burned out and pushed out by the younger generation, who considered him a relic in the industry. His wife, Nancy, a marble sculptor, was tired of losing her husband to Hollywood, and in a move to save their marriage, she dragged Phil—against his will and better judgment—to a tiny village in Italy where she had bought a decrepit, three-hundred-year-old farmhouse for them to restore and call home. What follows is a hilarious tale of how a neurotic workaholic is gradually seduced by Italy's natural charm and inexhaustible beauty—but only being after driven to near collapse by the eccentric neighbors, the maddening bureaucracy, and the crumbling old house that doesn't even have a road leading to it. This is a laugh-out-loud funny, sardonic take on a man who rediscovers himself, his marriage, and gets in touch—at long last—with his inner Italian.

#### **About the Author:**

**Phil Doran** worked as a writer-producer for such shows as *Sanford and Son* and *Too Close for Comfort* as well as writing episodes of *The Bob Newhart Show* and writing for variety-show stars Tim Conway, the Smothers Brothers, and Tony Orlando. He received an Emmy nomination, a Humanitas Award, and the Population Institute Award for his work on *All in the Family*. He has also written for the *Los Angeles Times*. He and his wife divide their time between Tuscany and their home in California.

## Acclaim:

“A midlife adventure involving the repair of a house and a marriage, and a lighter view of Italy that suffers no snob appeal. . . . Disarmingly funny.”

—*The Arizona Republic*

“*The Reluctant Tuscan* is the sort of travel narrative that is both hilariously funny and informative, comic and poignant, savory and sweet. Think Frances Mayes and Dave Barry, sprinkle with parmesan and olive oil, and you’ll soon know the irresistible quality dancing on Doran’s page.”

—Barbara DeMarco-Barrett, author of *Pen on Fire*

“Doran slowly and hilariously succumbs to the Italian way of life. . . . His ear for humor shines on every page . . . reveals Italy has never before, records a middle-aged man coming to terms with himself, and teaches us to look at what’s important in life.”

—*The Grand Rapids Press*

“Doran’s story is very amusing and his writing style is sardonic, witty, and right on.”

—*The Orange County Register*

“Tuscany’s gain is Hollywood’s loss. Just when you thought everything had been said about Italy, along comes Phil Doran with his hilarious take on how he was dragged kicking and screaming into paradise.”

—Lila Garrett,

Emmy and Writer’s Guild Award-winning writer, producer, and director

“Doran’s brutally funny accounts . . . are enough to keep readers hooked until the last page.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Moving to Italy has many delights and many pitfalls—Phil Doran’s charmingly laconic memoir gives us both, with the delights winning out as they undoubtedly do. Bravo!”

—Charles Nicholl, author of *Leonardo da Vinci: Flights of the Mind*

## Discussion Questions:

1. How is the *Piccolo Rustico* a metaphor for Phil Doran's life?
2. How is Italy different from America?
3. How would you feel if your spouse bought a house in Italy without consulting you and then invited you to give up your employment in America to come live with him/her in Tuscany?
4. What do you think of the tradition of the *passeggiata*? Can you imagine Americans following this tradition?
5. Phil Doran says that he cannot get used to certain differences in Italy from America, such as the Italians not having doggy bags, Italian men crying unrestrainedly, and their stores closing for a four hour break, etc. Do you sympathize with the author's difficulties?
6. Gradually, Phil Doran is seduced by Italy. What does he find particularly appealing about Italy and the Italians?
7. Phil Doran and his wife discover ways of persuading Italians to do what they want. What are the most efficient techniques?
8. Contrast Phil Doran's life in L.A. with his life in Italy.
9. What makes the author realize that he needs to leave L.A.?
10. What is it like driving in Italy?
11. Phil Doran tells us, "A magical friendliness is spread all over the place like pixie dust." How is the friendliness of Italians different from American friendliness?
12. What are some of the frustrations Phil Doran faces while living in Italy?
13. How does Phil Doran create tension and suspense?
14. What makes Phil Doran realize he's becoming an Italian?

15. What do you think of Phil Doran and his wife's hilarious way of putting Umberto in his place?
16. What does Phil Doran come to understand about his hostility towards Italians?
17. "Italians have a deep affection for the people of the United States." What accounts for these feelings?
18. The author comes to understand, "How the "where you are" ultimately becomes the "who you are"? How does this relate to differences between America and Italy?
19. Like many busy couples Phil and Nancy had led parallel lives for many years. Now that they have more time together how do they go about re-discovering each other and re-defining their relationship?"
20. In what ways is Phil Doran changed by Italy?
21. How does the past, sometimes ancient history, affect Italians today?