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Wood Fire Handbook

James Ogilvie is overwhelmed by Vincent Thurkettle's love of fire!

Every so often something literary comes along that takes you by surprise. *The Wood Fire Handbook* by Vincent Thurkettle is just such a volume. Now I guess you're thinking 'Oh I know all about firewood' or 'I've got a firewood book already' and that may be true, but bear with me on this one. Sure, *The Wood Fire Handbook* does what it says on the tin: taking you through all the essentials, like buying, cutting, seasoning, splitting and so forth. If you're looking for a wood fire bible then this book fits the bill admirably. But it's much, much more than 'the complete guide to a perfect fire' as its strap line suggests. I found myself drawn – at first reluctantly (because like you, I think I know my firewood) – and then gradually and finally inexorably, towards a full immersion reading experience. Why?

On one level *The Wood Fire Handbook* is a 'must-have' guidebook, starting with the (often overlooked) question 'Are wood fires right for you?' and then progressing to tree species and their burning characteristics; factors to consider when buying firewood; and the technicalities of moisture content and latent heat. There are chapters

on wood storage, how to prepare and tend the perfect fire and campfire cooking. But with consummate subtlety Vince lures his unsuspecting readers into a fascinating firewood world of folklore, tradition, personal anecdotes and humour.

This is not just a repository of factual information about wood fires: this is about the Zen of wood fires. As Thurkettle himself puts it "There is a feeling of touching nature herself – not as a tourist or spectator, but through being actively involved, understanding our past and being at one with this most ancient way of life – which brings an awareness and sense of 'belonging' that is hard to describe."

Here is someone who – by his own admission – "loves fire". Although in his book Vincent Thurkettle confesses, "I can't quite put my finger on why I'm so excited by it," his enthusiasm, knowledge and, yes, even love for the subject, shine through the pages. He has done what no one else has managed to do before: he has brought together all the practical stuff you need to know about wood fires and turned it into a fascinating read. Genius! Despite myself I couldn't help reading it from start to finish.

