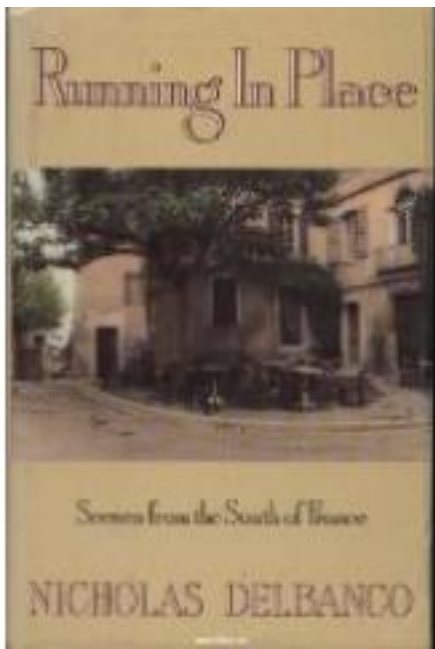


Running in Place: Scenes from the South of France



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From Publishers Weekly Novelist Delbanco (Sherbrookes) offers a record of his sojourns in Provence in the past three decades, variously shared with a friend, a lover, his wife and, later, his wife and two daughters. Too scanty on evocative description to serve as a travelogue, and lacking a unifying organizational plan, the book suggests a diary directed to an indulgent friend. Dwelling in the land immortalized by the Impressionist painters, the author alludes to them frequently, and affects an impressionistic style in prose, but his bemused, wandering attention fails to strike fire from the idea. His eagerness to display the breadth of his cultural knowledge (including excessive French phrase-dropping) seems at odds with Delbanco's apparent modesty about the loss of momentum his life has suffered in middle age. The self-portrait is neither attractive, full, nor particularly convincing,

and portraits of Delbanco's friends--with the exception of the late James Baldwin, revealed as richly human--are reduced in scale and scope by callow characterization. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal For over a century, Provence has been a magnet for artists and writers--e.g., Cezanne, Van Gogh, Picasso, Maugham, and Lawrence. Delbanco, a successful novelist himself, explores the lure of the Provencal landscape in this graceful blend of travelogue and memoir. Delbanco's account of his trip in 1987 with his wife and two daughters alternates with memories of earlier sojourns there: It was in Provence that he had his first serious love affair and wrote his first three novels. Throughout, Delbanco displays a keen eye and a facility for piquant observation. The proprietor of a bed-and-breakfast inn is described as "a redoubtable woman in blue who kept a Gauloise on her lower lip and an eye peeled for incompetence among the staff." Written with style and grace and leavened with humor, this is an elegant depiction of the effect of time on character and place.- Laurence Hull, Cannon Memorial Lib., Concord, N.C.Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. See all Editorial Reviews

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目录:

[Running in Place: Scenes from the South of France_ 下载链接1](#)

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