An entirely new kind of biography, Built of Books explores the mind and personality of Oscar Wilde through his taste in books.

This intimate account of Oscar Wilde’s life and writings is richer, livelier, and more personal than any book available about the brilliant writer, revealing a man who built himself out of books. His library was his reality, the source of so much that was vital to his life. A reader first, his readerly encounters, out of all of life’s pursuits, are seen to be as significant as his most important relationships with friends, family, or lovers. Wilde’s library, which Thomas Wright spent twenty years reading, provides the intellectual (and emotional) climate at the core of this deeply engaging portrait.

One of the book’s happiest surprises is the story of the author’s adventure reading Wilde’s library. Reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges’s fictional hero who enters Cervantes’s mind by saturating himself in the culture of sixteenth-century Spain, Wright employs Wilde as his own Virgilian guide to world literature. We come to understand how reading can be an extremely sensual experience, producing a physical as well as a spiritual delight.

Thomas Wright was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, Wildes alma mater. He lectures frequently on Wilde, and has written countless articles about him. The author of Oscar Wilde’s Table Talk, Wright lives in Genoa and London, and sometimes writes about subjects unconnected with his hero. This intimate account of Oscar Wilde’s life and writings is richer, livelier, and more personal than any book available about the brilliant writer, revealing a man who built himself out of books. His library was his reality, the source of so much that was vital to his life.
Wilde was a reader first, and his literary encounters, out of all of life's pursuits, are seen to be as significant as his most important relationships with friends, family, or lovers. His library, which Thomas Wright spent twenty years reading, was the intellectual and emotional element in which he lived, breathed, and wrote.

One of the book’s happiest surprises is the story of the author’s adventure reading Wilde’s library. Reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges’s fictional hero, Pierre Menard, who enters Cervantes’s mind by saturating himself in the culture of sixteenth-century Spain, Wright gets closer to Wilde than any other commentator by exploring the bookshelves of his library. We also come to understand the way Wilde read—reading was a sensual experience for him, producing a physical as well as an intellectual and spiritual delight.

Given its subject, Built of Books couldn’t fail to be fascinating . . . Thoroughly entertaining and useful.—Michael Dirda, The Washington Post

Entertaining and highly original, [Built of Books] is animated by a real intellectual passion. It should be read by anyone interested in Wilde or in the art of literary biography.—Peter Ackroyd

A wholly original book about reading, its comforts and perils: an eccentric landmark in the art of literary biography . . . riches on every page.—Daily Mail

[A] biography-cum-study of Wilde, which promises to measure out the life not by the familiar biographical landmarks, but by a chronological excavation of Wildes life-long reading list . . . One hundred and eight years after his demise, we still seem not to have run out of things to say about Wilde—and Wrights novel slant allows quite a few of them to be said again with both knowledge and flair.—The Guardian

If you're a newcomer to the wonderful world of Wilde, and can’t face the length . . . of the now-official Ellman biography, this is the book for you . . . Perhaps no other scholar of Wilde has succeeded so well in moving into Oscars head.—The Irish Times

Revealing portrait of the noted—and notorious—writer, viewed through the prism of the books that educated, inspired and comforted him. From birth, Oscar Wilde was awash in words. His Anglo-Irish parents recounted aloud local tales, classic literature and their own work (Sir William was a pioneering folklorist, Lady Wilde a famous poetess), fostering both an early aptitude and undying love for language, writing and books. Wilde thrilled at
collecting and devouring a variety of volumes; each added to his prodigious intellect as well as to a store of ideas that contributed to many a lush oration. His years at Oxford were marked by extravagant academic accomplishments, particularly in the classics he had loved since childhood, and by symposiums hosted with Socratic gusto in his school quarters. As an adult of growing notoriety, Wilde found sustenance, inspiration and solace in his prized library; he regarded the carefully collected books as both a record of his life and as an emblem of his personality. Wilde scholar Wright, who spent 20 years reading this library, allows his own prose to convey his subjects literary duality—excess and allusion. Hubris had provoked the wrath of the Gods, and Doom entered the stage with running feet, he writes of the guilty verdict in the infamous Queensbury trial, referring to the Greek tragedies that provided so much joy to Wilde the reader but also inescapably pervaded his life. In general, the author suggests, Wilde enjoyed the pleasant confusion of life and art—until his prison sentence forced him to become an actual tragic hero. At the start of his incarceration, all of his belongings, including his entire library, were sold at public auction to settle his debts. An inconsolable Wilde suffered the losses behind bars; he would never fully recover. The author accents this remarkable account with pages of Wildes reading lists, reproductions of annotated books and an index of referenced authors. A sumptuous literary biography.—Kirkus Reviews

Twenty years ago, Wright, a writer and lecturer on Oscar Wilde, decided to read all the books that Wilde had read. Ultimately, he realized that he could not complete this task, but he learned enough to write an engaging literary biography. Because Wildes father was a preeminent Irish folklorist and his mother a poet, he became a voracious reader, aided by a photographic memory and a talent for speed reading. Having been found guilty in 1895 of gross indecency and sentenced to two years in prison, his personal library was sold at auction. Although some valuable first editions and other books with Wildes inscriptions and annotations were purchased by friends and eventually returned to him, a significant and unknown number were dispersed; Wright was able to locate and examine many of them. Wrights passion and knowledge radiate through this detailed yet readable portrait. Recommended for devotees of Wilde and literary biography as well as those who simply love books.—Anthony Pucci, Library Journal

My Personal Review:
I've had an opportunity to view many pieces on favorite authors, events, and places. I like to go beyond the staid coverage of the topic in question, to the individual pieces: influences, inserts, and inputs that make the person, play or place function and flourish. General biographies are fine as a start, especially when they also describe the environment that the subject operates but they are few and far between. Even less available (while acceptable or even understandable) are the books that explain the
person through the prism of their parts: interests, influences, and passions. Built of Books is one such document that allow us to gain some understanding of Oscar Wilde, through his love of books. While the author does use terms such as "perhaps," and "may be," etc., his piecing of the Wilde puzzle is like a story being told, allowing for each of us, as the listeners to come to our own conclusions about Mr. Wilde and his life, and just as importantly, the importance of books, in developing our own passions in life. For me personally, this book made me review (and even order) other documents on Oscar Wilde, as well as other materials on the passion of books. This is just another example of a book reaffirming my love of books (with an additional interest in Wilde and other favorite authors of mine and their influences). Thank you, Thomas Wright, for a thoroughly enjoyable "story" of one of our greatest storytellers - Obviously, I recommend the book highly!

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Built of Books: How Reading Defined the Life of Oscar Wilde (John MacRae Books) by Thomas Wright - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!