

## Review #81

### *Mr Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948)*

Cary Grant and Myrna Loy

#### TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DZXuLvEFjk>



#### SYNOPSIS

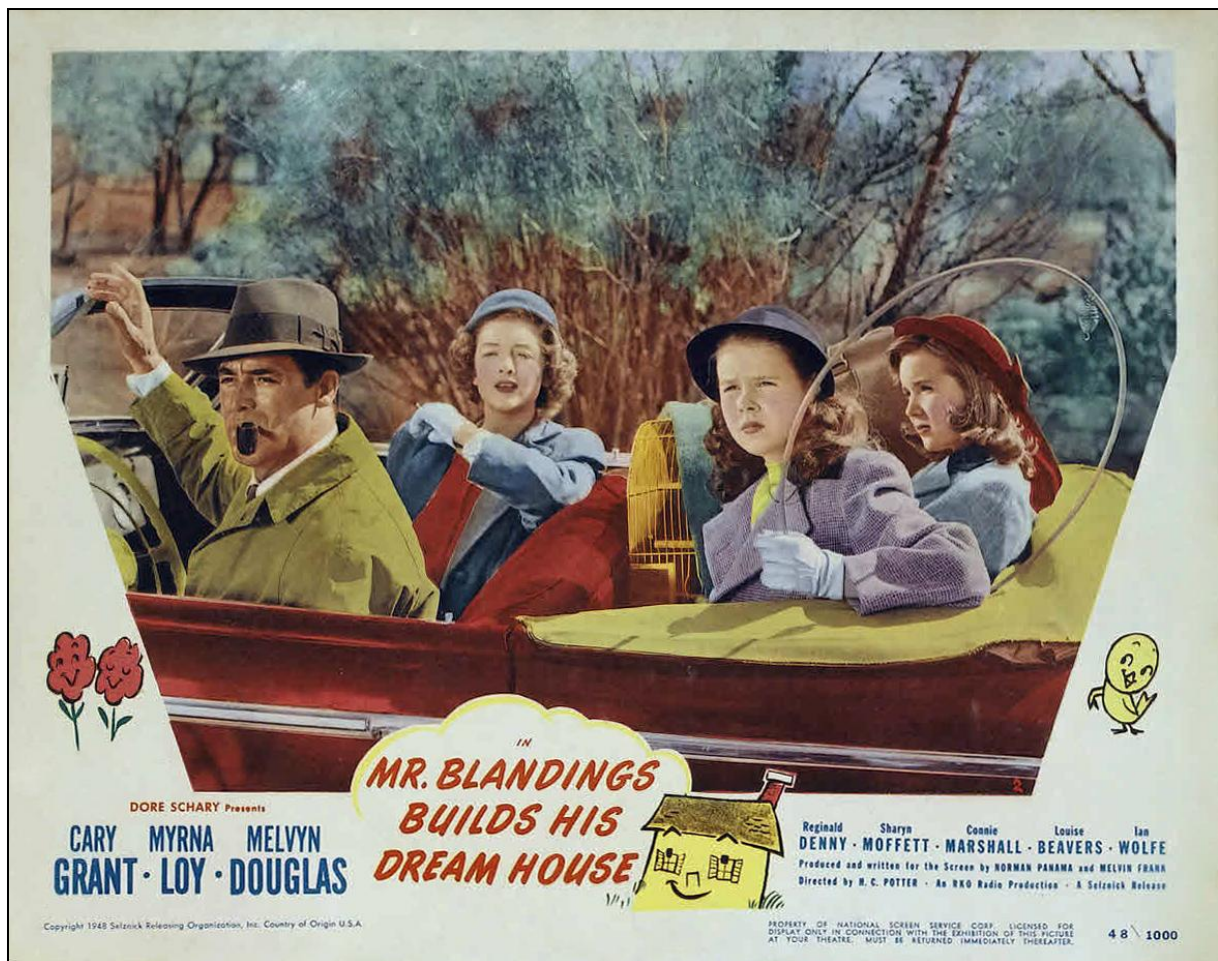
Jim Blandings (**Cary Grant**), a bright account executive in the advertising business, lives with his wife Muriel (**Myrna Loy**) and two daughters in a cramped New York apartment. Muriel secretly plans to **remodel their apartment**. After a hilarious opening sequence that sells just how tightly packed everybody is, the Blandings go house-hunting in Connecticut, where they fall for a large house in fictional Lansdale County, Connecticut.

The couple seems to have **rushed into things**, though : the broker mischaracterized the size of the property and the state of the home, which is beyond repair and needs to be torn down. It is a dilapidated, 200-year-old farmhouse dating from the Revolutionary War era. Blandings purchases the property for more than the going rate for land in the area, provoking his friend and lawyer Bill Cole (**Melvyn Douglas**) to chastise him for following his heart rather than his head. The Blandings hire architect Simms to **design and supervise the construction of the new home**. From the original purchase to the new house's completion, a long litany of unforeseen troubles and setbacks beset the hapless Blandings and delay their moving-in date.

**Armed with more enthusiasm than common sense**, Blandings causes many a headache for his lawyer, who tries to keep the costs within a reasonable amount. Alas, Blandings bulls ahead on his own. An unpleasant legal squabble over the fact that Blandings purchased his new property without checking with the prior owners throws even more good money after bad. The construction of the new Blandings digs is slowed down to a walk by doors and windows that don't fit, plumbing that fails to function, doorknobs that break upon contact with human flesh, temperamental workmen, and **various (equally sundry) other home-owners' nightmares**. Attempting to keep a level head throughout the proceedings is Mrs. Blandings, though even she is guilty of pretensions and excess, especially in the classic '*choice of colours*' scene.

On top of all this, at work Jim is assigned the task of coming up with a slogan for WHAM Brand Ham, an advertising account that has destroyed the careers of previous account executives assigned to it. Jim also suspects that Muriel is cheating on him with Bill Cole after Bill slept at the Blandingses's alone in the house with Muriel one night due to a violent thunderstorm. The humour in *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* springs so naturally from the central situation that this go-nowhere bit seems **intrusive and arbitrary** – a mere subplot point that the original **Eric Hodgins** novel did just fine without.

With mounting pressure, skyrocketing expenses, and his new assignment, Jim starts to wonder why he wanted to live in the country. Eventually, their maid Gussie **provides Blandings with the perfect WHAM slogan**, and he saves his job. As the film ends, Bill Cole says that he realizes that some things '**you do buy with your heart.**'



## REVIEW

**The classic tale of leaving the city and building a house in the country, only to find country life isn't so simple. Hilarious !**

With Cary Grant and Myrna Loy playing a happily married couple who decide to build their dream house in Connecticut, what could possibly go wrong ? As far as Mr. Blandings's house in concerned, just about everything, but in regard to the film, there's nothing wrong with the foundations and structure of this **charming gem that the whole family can enjoy.**

### 1 – **The Plan**

In the year 1948, New York City was very much like today : a **congested, overpopulated metropolis.** The apartment the Blandings call home is larger than one is likely to find affordable in 21<sup>th</sup> century New York, but it is still too small for a family of four. The sequence

in which Jim's effort to get ready for work becomes hazardous because of limited space is **wonderfully realistic and humorous**. **Despite the discomfort of daily living**, Jim initially isn't convinced of this need and objects when Muriel suggests expanding their apartment. **His resistance is to the cost**, but he quickly comes around when he sees a persuasive ad.

Thanks to the charm of Grant and Loy, as well as the witty humour of this delightful story, we are taken along for the ride as the Blandings seek their dream house. **Duped by their imaginations and a guileful salesman**, the purchased house turns out to be a costly mistake, but it ultimately leads to a new idea — they will ***build their own dream house*** !

## 2 – **The Foundation**

With that new goal, the central journey of the story begins, and the hilarity increases as the building project strikes more disasters than the builders strike nails. In the midst of the comedic havoc, there are several positive messages that Mr. Blandings and his dream house manage to convey. The relationship between Jim and Muriel, though not perfect, is overall a **positive representation of marriage**. When the chips — or in this case floorboards — are down, Muriel **supports Jim and offers forgiveness when his mistakes lead the family into potential trouble**. This couple is also very much in love, despite the years that have passed and the kids who have come along.

Even when Jim does at one point act suspicious of his wife, the filmmakers are careful to make clear in previous scenes with Muriel and Bill that nothing immoral transpired. It is also evident that Jim only makes his **wild, imaginative leap** because he is at a **climax of worry, fatigue, and stress** that makes him abandon the trust he should normally have in his wife.

The failing of Jim in this situation is further redeemed by the opportunity it creates for Bill to demonstrate the friendship he has been wielding so valiantly throughout the rest of the film. **Under a coating of tough love**, Bill is always ready to offer support, guidance, and favours to Jim and Muriel. Even when Bill's advice isn't heeded, he consistently wants the best for his friends, **doing everything in his power to help them achieve their dream**. As a foil to Jim and Muriel, Bill also functions as an **example of the value of level-headedness, savvy decision-making, and practical wisdom**.

The other potential (minor) cause for concern in this film is the Blandings' two daughters, as they **demonstrate a lack of respect for their father at times**. However, these moments are dealt with in a realistic manner that allows them to be a humorous and essentially harmless representation of the scenes many parents encounter with their adolescents on a daily basis. In addition, the daughters' obedience in most situations, enthusiastic greetings and demonstrations of affection toward him **compensate for these moments of questioning his authority**.

This overall **affirmation of family** adds to the positive representations of love and friendship in the film, but this movie surprisingly has a few more layers of themes. By the end of the story, and without even noticing, we've absorbed **additional lessons on the dangers of cynicism and mistrust**, as well as the **importance of perspicacity, wisdom, responsibility, and even the value of having dreams !**

### 3 – **The Dream Builders**

The opening of the film starts a bit slowly, especially when compared with the fast pacing to which modern film-goers are accustomed, but the **understated humour and a strong script with witty dialogues** compensate for the initially sluggish storytelling. Director H. C. Potter, whom we have to thank for more than one **clean and classic film**, brings the best out of his actors and the screenplay, weaving a tale that is uncompromisingly, yet hilariously real.

Loved by audiences for their on-screen chemistry, Grant and Loy deliver again with their **relaxed banter and genuine relationship**. Though perhaps not as romantic as their previous pairings, Grant and Loy achieve exactly what is **appropriate and good** here as an all-American couple, who just happen to be a bit more attractive and wittier than most :

- As Muriel, **Myrna Loy** is more **elegant** than ever yet reasonably **down-to-earth**
- Casting off his romantic charisma and suave sophistication, **Cary Grant**, also known for *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) or *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), handles both physical and verbal comedy with natural effortlessness. He is simply Jim Blandings, who turns out to be a **very funny and likable fellow**. His charmer looks, outraged noises and widened eyes can get weary at times but on the whole, he does his job quite well.

Good direction, acting, and script. **Positive values, clean humour and appeal for all ages**. A true classic not to be missed, *Mr. Blandings* shows that the effort to obtain the **American Dream** might not be easy, but in this timeless movie, it's sure fun to watch ! ++