

HORST A. FRIEDRICHS  
STUART HUSBAND

# Bookstores

A Celebration of Independent Booksellers

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
NORA KRUG

PRESTEL  
MUNICH LONDON NEW YORK

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# Paper Towns

NORA KRUG

Imagine the sense of excitement a traveller must have felt some 450 years ago when entering Christophe Plantin's print shop in Antwerp, viewing the books he had on offer. Imagine leafing through the pages of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (the first true modern atlas, 1570), and *Dictionarium Tetraglotton* (a dictionary in Greek, Latin, French and Flemish, 1562), and *La Institutione di una Fanciulla Nata Nobilmente* (a manual on the education of young girls, 1555), or closely examining his illustrated bibles, travel stories and song books, sold there and distributed at the Frankfurt Book Fair (the first of which took place in 1454), to places as far away as China, India and the Spanish colonies, expanding the minds of our reading ancestors. Plantin himself strongly believed in the educational and humanist value of literature. Suspecting him of printing materials of heretic and anti-Spanish content, the Spanish ordered the raiding of his workshop in 1561, but Plantin had the foresight to sell all of his radical books in advance of the raid - only to buy them back once normalcy returned. In 1576, Spanish mercenaries looted and torched Antwerp, but by paying them an enormous ransom, Plantin was able to save his books.

Readers today don't have to travel for weeks by boat or horse-drawn coach to purchase a book. Production modes and distribution methods have changed, but the same excitement greets the contemporary reader when entering a bookstore that reflects the idiosyncratic perspective of its owner. Entering an independent bookstore feels like setting foot in a strange town. You find yourself promenading paper boulevards, passing lively town squares, then turning corners and wandering down secret alleyways, perhaps hoping to lose yourself in a quiet dead end - to take refuge from the world outside, or even from yourself. The books on the shelves are like the people you'd encounter along the way, the covers are their faces, the sentences their thoughts. You pick them off their shelves, weigh them in your hands, you open them up and begin a conversation. Some speak easily, some with hesitation. Some have manners, others don't. Some you couldn't agree with more, others contradict your every word. Some are reassuring and comforting, others confuse and frighten you. All of them sharpen your senses, and when you leave the store (hopefully with a purchased book in your bag), you find that you are richer: in images and words, in thoughts and feelings.

Books are more than just cultural artefacts. They are manifestations of who we are. They are proof that we exist, and they make a commitment to remembering that we have lived once we are gone. They give us the illusion that not everything is ephemeral, that there has to be a reason for why we are here, that our struggles aren't futile. Because books show us who we are, they satisfy our desire to culturally belong. And by telling us who we might become, they allow us to question all we take for granted, test our ethical conscience, gain distance to the world in order to challenge our relationship with it, and question our commitment to it.

Books are therefore under threat when the edges of democracy begin to crumble. Totalitarian regimes control printing, publishing and distribution, stifling the possibility for critical thinking, which can, in turn, breed intolerance and acts of violence. In democratic societies, too, the political power of books can make them vulnerable. Book burnings aren't only a thing of the past: in the fall of 2019, students at a university in the United States burned a novel on campus by an author who had visited the college to engage in a dialogue about diversity and white privilege. Books defend our human dignity, and therefore we have to protect them – just as Christophe Plantin did four and a half centuries ago.

Independent bookstores are free from state-mandated, or even just mainstream taste. They provide access to books that make us think and challenge our conventional viewpoints, which is precisely why they are important. They underline the necessity of diverse opinions, they give voice to authors otherwise left unheard, they provide a sense of community and a platform for radical ideas. They are sites and sanctuaries for democratic thinking.

After a period of decline, there has been an increase in independent bookstores in some countries. But their survival continues to be challenged. If people used to have to travel by horse-drawn coach for days on end just to purchase a book, then we can support the well-being of our local bookstore by, among other ways, walking to the shop to pick one up, instead of going online. And perhaps, while we wait in line, we can give the resident cat a good scratch behind its ear.





SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY – PARIS



bookshop

LONDON

William Eggleston  
The Democ  
forest

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YOUR LIFE  
FOREVER

FACT



ANZENBERGERGALLERY – VIENNA





JOHN SANDOE BOOKS – LONDON

# The Strand

NANCY BASS WYDEN

If our name is synonymous with that of New York City, I think that being in business for almost a century has something to do with it. It's always been my family's mission to put good books in the hands of readers. My grandfather started The Strand in the 1920s with \$600 and his own book collection. He slept on a cot in the basement when times got really tough. He bought the eleven-storey building we're in now to safeguard the business. It's just been given city landmark status, which I'm appealing against - it drives up the costs of everything, which we don't need - but I'm happy to regard The Strand as a landmark in its own right.

My earliest memory of the place? I'd come in here with my mom and my brother, and they'd kind of turn me loose. I remember seeing what seemed like an ocean of books, and imbibing the fabulous chocolatey, musky smell they gave off. I'd run to the kid's section, sweep my fingers along the spines, and be told I could choose any book that was there. I remember my delight in feeling like I was the queen of the stacks. And seeing my dad and granddad working here too, they felt like giants. I guess books were my candy.

You know, the death of bookstores has probably been prophesied ever since bookstores began. We started on Book Row, where you had six blocks containing forty-eight bookstores in competition. One was even called The Cheapest Bookstore in The World. So it was a struggle to survive back then; then paperbacks were supposed to put us out of business, then the movies, then TV, then the big box stores, then the internet, then e-books. We've always been under assault by something, but it just keeps you on your toes. People still love the space of a bookstore as a place to dream, to "Get Lost in the Stacks", as our slogan has it, where getting lost is a positive thing. You see customers stop as they come in, take a deep breath, prepare to decompress a little from the city, maybe go back in time a little bit. And we try to hire employees that love

books - you have to pass a literary test before you're taken on, which, believe me, is not easy - and who want to share their enthusiasms. Almost everyone's a literary major. Ben McFall, our head of fiction who's been here since the 1970s, was called the "Oracle of The Strand" by the *New York Times*. People are always coming to him for suggestions on what to read next.

David Bowie, who was a regular here, said, "You always find the book you didn't know you wanted at The Strand." We have eighteen miles of books - from the bargain carts outside, which are like our gateway drug, to the rare book room like an old, magical attic upstairs - and we also have access to amazing estates in and around New York, who think of us as the best repository for their collections, as well as creating home libraries for people. I did a library for Moby and he said it felt like Christmas because I picked out things he'd never encountered but really appreciated. What do I love doing most here? The sort of extracurricular stuff. I started the event program, and we now hold 400 signings and talks a year; we run a kids' story time where we get people costumed up as the book's characters to narrate; we have our own leather bookmarks, a candle line, a tea line, bags and socks, anything that's really just fun to try.

My favourite section? I love rare books, but my favourite to read is memoirs and biographies. Right now I'm in the middle of the Truman Capote biography by Gerald Clarke. Oh my gosh, it's brilliant. I'm still passionate about books and reading. I love it when customers tell me this is their most cherished place in New York City, or to hear from authors like Gary Shteyngart that we inspired them to become writers. Patti Smith and Mary Gaitskill both worked here. In fact, Patti Smith's sister also worked here and met her husband here, and they're still married. I think there are more than a few Strand babies running around out there, getting lost in the stacks, just like I did.



NANCY BASS WYDEN – THE STRAND – NEW YORK CITY





THE STRAND – NEW YORK CITY





THE STRAND – NEW YORK CITY



