



Knud Wassermann

Temples for books

In its “Do You Read Me?” book, the German design publishing house has attempted to capture some of the world’s most beautiful bookshops between two book covers. And it is more than a success. It is the indispensable travel guide for all book enthusiasts.

The wonderful thing about bookstores is that they cannot be reduced to mere selling. They invite you to linger and pause for a moment, and offer the ideal environment to stock up on reading material in peace and quiet. They enrich the neighborhood with readings, writing workshops and book-signing sessions, and provide a stage for authors and publishers. The [“Do You Read Me?” book](#) presents some 60 bookstores around the globe. The individual shops are as diverse as their owners, and each one has its own story to tell.

There are small bookshops where books are stacked up to the ceiling, minimalist concept stores, and genuine book temples. They are in apartments, on boats, or in Gothic churches. Jürgen Boss, Director of the Frankfurt Book Fair, sums it up as follows in the foreword: “Bookstores make a crucial contribution to preserving cultural diversity, they actively support human rights, they are concerned with equal opportunities and tolerance, not with serving elitist circles.” In the best case, booksellers know their customers so well that they recommend the right book at the right time – with no need for an inscrutable algorithm.

A passion for books

When browsing the book, you can't help but be amazed. Inevitably under its spell, I was captivated by El Ateneo Gran Splendid in the Argentine capital Buenos Aires. It is certainly one of the most beautiful bookstores in the world and reflects the vibrant Argentine book culture.

Another highlight is the [Strand Book Store](#) on New York's Broadway. On more than 5,000 m², about 2.5 million books are offered for sale, both new and antiquarian books. The Strand is a true institution and a place where the passion for books is celebrated every day.

A cultural meeting point high above the clouds

Upon entering the [Carturesti Carusel bookstore](#) in the Romanian capital Bucharest, a dream opens up for all book aficionados. In 2015, extensive restoration breathed new life into the store (see picture above). With a combination of assortment, design and events, the bookstore has primarily attracted a young regular customer base. It does not see itself as a pure bookstore, but rather as a cultural meeting point, where the focus is on reading.

The name "[Books over the Clouds](#)" can be taken literally – it is a bookstore on the 52nd floor in the Chinese metropolis Shanghai. At a height of 239 meters, more than 60,000 books are available to choose from in the flagship store of Duoyun Books. The spacious bookshop includes an exhibition room and has its own café.

Number of independent bookshops on the increase

The examples show that bookstores have by no means lost their charm due to the advancement of digital technologies. "A bookshop is one of the few places where you can spend a lot of time without spending money," George Orwell emphasized in his essay "Bookshop Memories". If you factor in the losses from online trading and the rising rents in downtown areas, it is almost logical that many of the independent booksellers are struggling to survive economically.

Although the number of independent bookstores in the USA has increased for the first time in 20 years after conglomerates like Amazon rewrote the rules of the book business. In Australia, small retailers are prevailing over the big chains, and a trend reversal has also been observed in the UK. In Germany, the number of independent booksellers has remained relatively consistent over the past five years. The positive development is evidence of the creativity and staying power of independent booksellers, but it should not obscure the difficult situation.

The "Do You Read Me?" book is a tribute to all booksellers who are passionate about selling books, discovering new books, hoarding old treasures and making them available to the public.

Do You Read Me?

Besondere Buchläden und ihre Geschichten

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Your

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