

Book Club



We stack up Cambridge's indie bookshops, by specialty

BY SANDRA GIARDI

Book superstores certainly have a niche. Their range is vast, their book quantities are generous, ordering is convenient and there's often caffeine to boot. And, while there's no denying the success such book behemoths gain from branding, they seem to lack the character inherent in cluttered, independent bookshops. In Cambridge—and particularly Harvard Square, which boasts a concentration of bookstores to rival any locale in the U.S.—self-reliant small-frys contribute to the personality of the bustling hub in a big way. They're also chock-full of those gloriously tactile details—nicked hardwood floors, cream-colored pages and embossed linen covers, and a wonderfully claustrophobic feeling triggered by stacks of volumes—that you miss out on when browsing via a superstore's online search field and buying with an “add to cart” button. But see for yourself; here follows our compilation of top Cambridge bookshops, singled out by specialty.

HARVARD BOOK STORE—GENERAL

In business since 1932 and across the street from—although not affiliated with—a similarly titled university, this retailer for readers is truly extraordinary and was named “one of the world's top shops” on *Forbes.com* (2005). Its crammed but well-ordered wooden shelves, reached by rolling ladders, are stacked 10 stories high with fiction and nonfiction on every conceivable subject. Displays are impressive, bountiful with fresh-from-the-press works like Ted Kennedy's new memoir or a restored edition of Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*. The store also boasts frequent author readings, a used and remaindered book selection downstairs, and an unmitigated commitment to service, to wit: book delivery, book club picks and scores of staff suggestions. 1256 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, 617.661.1515, www.harvardbookstore.com

GROLIER POETRY BOOK SHOP—POETRY

Around the corner from Harvard Book Store is another storied literary pantheon with roots that extend back to 1927. Modest in size and lined with slim, stacked volumes, Grolier's exclusively celebrates the art of poetry and is committed to inspiring new devotees and its loyal audience with lyrical works and spoken poetry events. Here, you shop in the presence of greatness, as the store claims a clientele that has, over the years, included ee cummings, Robert Lowell, T.S. Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Creeley and Robert Pinsky—still a frequent customer. 6 Plympton St., Cambridge, 617.547.4648, www.grolier-poetrybookshop.org

SCHOENHOF'S—FOREIGN BOOKS

A rare find for international transplants and visitors, this Harvard Square store was founded in 1856 and stocks North America's largest selection of foreign language titles. Need Nietzsche in Italian or *Charlotte's Web* in Spanish? Schoenhof's carries thousands of classics, children's books, foreign travel books, language learning resources and other titles in languages and dialects from French, German, Italian and Spanish to more remote tongues like Urdu and Zulu. It's a delight to pore through the reads on the store's crammed yellow shelves that often spill over into neat piles of texts on the floor. 76A Mount Auburn St., Cambridge, 617.547.8855, www.schoenhofs.com

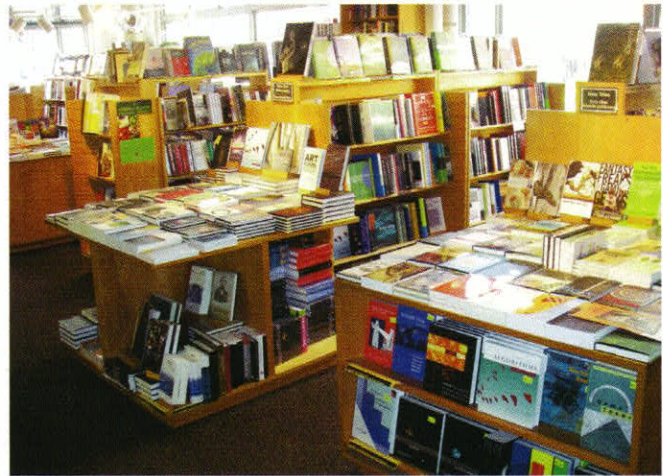
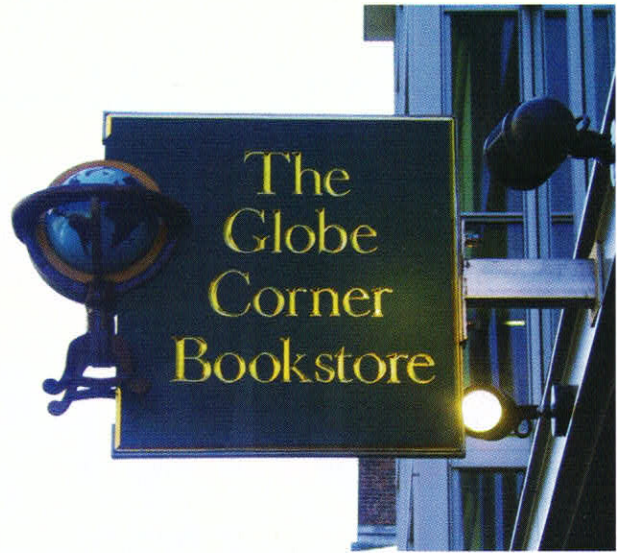


CURIOUS GEORGE BOOKS & TOYS—CHILDREN'S BOOKS

This storybook wonderland instantly stirs the imaginations of budding readers. Classic characters like Eloise, Corduroy, Madeleine, Babar and, of course, Curious George take center stage, though newer kiddie bestsellers like *Fancy Nancy*, *Pinkalicious* and *Library Lion* are also on the shelves. Nonfiction delves into science, nature and folklore, while parents appreciate the array of reference books and workbooks that help little ones learn. Downstairs, older readers find a den where they can dive into Nancy Drew mysteries or become spellbound by Harry Potter. Shoppers also find a host of toys and related gifts. 1 J.F.K. St., Cambridge, 617.498.0062, www.curious.com

THE MIT PRESS BOOKSTORE—TEXTBOOKS, MIT TITLES AND JOURNALS


Not far from Harvard Square is an ideas-driven haven representing Cambridge's other whip-smart learning institution—MIT. This cerebral store owned and operated by The MIT Press peddles its own titles, those written by MIT authors, as well as a smattering of other publishers' texts in chosen fields. Topics cover what you'd expect from the Kendall Square science and technology mecca: neuroscience and cognitive science, economics, renewable energy, architecture, digital history and culture, hardware hacking, and yes, even a few subjects for right-brained readers like new media, fine art and design. 292 Main St., Cambridge, 617.253.5249, web.mit.edu/bookstore/www/



THE GLOBE CORNER BOOKSTORE—TRAVEL BOOKS AND MAPS

With its glass façade, standing globes and striking blond wood shelves, The Globe Corner Bookstore veers from its homey bookish neighbors in both décor and content. Its unparalleled and wonderfully rich inventory delves beyond *Frommer's* and *Fodor's* to bring globe-trotters highly specialized guides from *The Traditional Shops and Restaurants of London* to *Street French Slang*. Travel writing, anthropological reads, atlases, maps, language lessons, regional cookbooks and oversized coffee-table tomes with titles like *500 Journeys of a Lifetime* entice patrons to get packing. 90 Mount Auburn St., Cambridge, 617.497.6277, www.globecorner.com

RAVEN USED BOOKS—USED, SCHOLARLY TEXTS

This small-scale, lower-level bookshop is packed to the gills with gently-worn, discounted titles and is an excellent place to scour for the classics that somehow escaped your reading lists. From under the subtle scent of patchouli, browsers find a wealth of history, philosophy, theology, cultural studies, fiction, literature and lit crit, as well as a section earmarked for regional scribes Thoreau and Emerson, a near-complete canon of Salman Rushdie and a coveted collection of art books. 52B J.F.K. St., Cambridge, 617.441.6999, www.ravenusedbooks.com 

Opposite page: venerable Harvard Book Store. This page (clockwise from left): imaginations soar at Curious George Books & Toys; travelers' roost The Globe Corner Bookstore; and The MIT Press Bookstore's brainy displays