







# INDIE BOOK BIZ

As an epicenter of culture and creativity, the local bookstore can tell you a lot about a community. That's why they are thriving.  
By Haley Shapley

To say the retail landscape has changed in the past two decades would be an understatement. With the advent of online shopping, many brick-and-mortar powerhouses have gone out of business or moved to online retail — see Toys R Us and Borders for just a few examples. But there's one category of store that's actually thriving: the independent bookstore.

It's a surprising trajectory. Community bookstores were in trouble when megastores Barnes & Noble and Borders came to town. Add e-books and Amazon — with its competitively priced titles that arrive at your doorstep — and it seemed like mom-and-pop booksellers were headed straight to relic status.



Yet somehow, from 2009 to 2015, the number of independent bookstores climbed 35 percent, from 1,651 stores to 2,227. That caught the attention of Harvard Business School professor Ryan Raffaelli. After hundreds of interviews and focus groups, 90-plus hours of observation and field trips to bookstores in 13 states, he determined that success comes down to three factors:

- 1. Community:** Independent booksellers were among the first businesses to promote the idea of shopping locally to create a strong local economy.
- 2. Curation:** Small bookstores offer a personalized experience to hand-sell each book.
- 3. Convening:** Bookstores have become gathering places and hosts to all kinds of events, from children's birthday parties to game nights to writers' groups.

Of those 2,227 bookstores scattered across the country, here are a handful that exemplify these three key traits — and are worth visiting.





## THE WILD DETECTIVES

DALLAS, TEXAS

"Do you think that Hemingway, Faulkner or Kerouac would have become Hemingway, Faulkner and Kerouac had they just sat behind their typewriters?" asks The Wild Detective. "Conversation and human interaction, those are the raw materials stories are made of."

That's why you'll find a bar in the middle of this vibrant bookstore in Dallas' Oak Cliff neighborhood, to promote the kind of socialization that makes for good stories. With live music on the back porch, author readings and books clubs in English and Spanish, the scene here is always buzzing. Plus, they've got some cool initiatives — order a book through the shop, and they'll waive the shipping charges and buy you a drink on the house.

**314 W. Eighth St., (214) 942-0108,  
thewilddetectives.com**

## MIDTOWN SCHOLAR BOOKSTORE

HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

When Eric Papenfuse and Catherine Lawrence, a husband-and-wife team who met as grad students at Yale University, wanted to open a bookstore in Pennsylvania's capital city, many believed it was a foolish endeavor. The declining Midtown neighborhood simply didn't seem to be a good fit for a scholarly shop with a sizable collection of academic works. But the naysayers were wrong. The bookstore became a much-needed community gathering place that hosted political debates, forums on civic issues and art critique groups. Today, peruse the 200,000-plus books, grab a slice of sweet potato pie in the café and attend one of those conversation-starting events for which the store is known.

**1302 N. Third St., (717) 236-1680,  
midtownscholar.com**







## POWELL'S BOOKS

PORTLAND, OREGON

It doesn't get much grander than Powell's, Portland's beloved bookshop that takes up an entire city block. And although this store in a former car dealership hosts more than 500 author events a year and contains shelves packed with more than a million volumes, it never feels impersonal. That's because the staff truly loves books and knows how to connect to every type of reader. Fair warning: Stepping in here is like a time warp — don't be surprised if you get blissfully lost among the aisles, emerging just in time to wonder where the day has gone.

**1005 W. Burnside St., (800) 878-7323, [powells.com](http://powells.com)**

## PARNASSUS BOOKS

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Parnassus Books takes its name from Greek mythology, in which Mount Parnassus was the home of literature, learning and music. That's a tall order to live up to, but this light and bright haven for book lovers does so beautifully. Co-owned by novelist Ann Patchett, the shop is a dream for writers and the readers who love connecting with them. It hosts frequent author events, has a nice stock of signed books and offers a book club registry so local groups can easily order and purchase their club's monthly selection at a discount.

**3900 Hillsboro Pike, Suite 14, (615) 953-2243, [parnassusbooks.net](http://parnassusbooks.net)**



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