



A Bibliophile's Nirvana

Books are better the second time around

BY TOM SOBOLESKI

"Second-hand books are wild books, homeless books . . . and have a charm which the domesticated volumes of the library lack."

Virginia Woolf

Within the eclectic confines of Book Barn in Niantic, Connecticut, you can play chess on a three-foot square table under a tree, pet goats, picnic with your brownbag lunch, or just daydream in a rocking chair by one of its secluded koi ponds. And that's just a short list of features at the main campus, anchored by a three-story barn on the edge of Rt. 156 in Niantic.

The books are the stars here—and all second-hand—and the assortment is truly astounding. It's a bibliophile's nirvana, where obscure titles like *Monks & Wine—Benedictine Wine of Germany* are racked near \$7 hardcovers of current bestsellers like *The Woman in Cabin 10*. Whether your

niche is Gnostic gospels, witch almanacs or old Marvel comic books, the Book Barn has a mind-boggling array. There's Voltaire, de Sade, Wolfe and Woolf, and 40-plus volumes of the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, and shelf after shelf of art books.

It all began in 1987 when owner Randi White got tired of his father's pizza joint in New London and decided to try selling used books. He rented the basement of an old barn and opened "with three bookcases and a couch, a cement floor, four light bulbs and a plywood ceiling," he says. Through rummaging, estate sales and buying from customers, White and his wife Maureen oversee an inventory that has ballooned to four branch shops holding upwards

of half-a-million books and a growing collection of DVDs and audio books. He employs 25, works six-and-a-half day weeks, and rarely takes a vacation.

All Book Barn locations have couches among the stacks and complimentary coffee, tea, and cookies. The main campus comprises four outbuildings beyond the main barn, with clever names like Hades and the Last Page. Everything is sorted by topic and author. Most hardcover fiction is \$4 and all paperbacks are \$1.

Literary antiquarians may well find some rare treasures. Nineteenth century copies of Goethe and Whittier are among numerous rare books. You can grab a 50th anniversary edition of *Citizen Kane* for \$12, complete with poster and a copy of the original film script.

If you're a cat person, look for the *Cat Spotting Guide* at the main campus, complete with photos and personalities of the many cats that roam the grounds.

The Book Barn is truly a destination for shoreline day tripping; one visit and its charm will captivate you. Nell Driscoll, who manages Store 4, calls it, "A one-of-a-kind enigma in this world today." That's consistent with its unique mission statement of ". . . uniting people and books together in biblioholic bliss."

All branches are open daily 9–9. For information visit bookbarnniantic.com. ●

Adieu, Bearskin Rug?

Floor coverings move on from the animal pelt

BY SHERRI DALEY

Next year will be the 45th anniversary of Burt Reynolds' regrettable photo shoot for *Cosmopolitan* magazine. He joined the ranks of countless naked babies, as well as many celebs-on-a-rug, notably Jean Harlow and Marilyn Monroe, when he doffed his clothes and reclined on a brown bear rug for famed photographer Francesco Scavullo. Many of us, after trying