

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## HOMES

# Private Libraries That Inspire

Difficult to build and maintain, these elaborate spaces contain the passions and obsessions of their owners.

*By Katy McLaughlin*

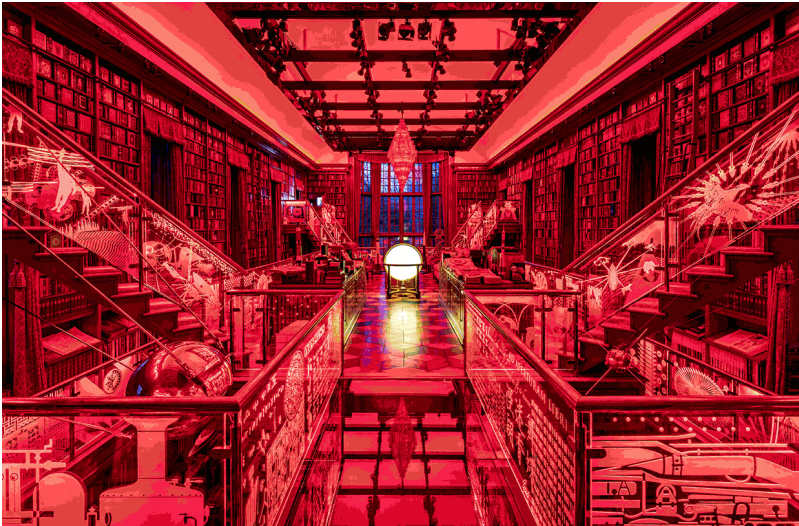
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Forget the Dewey Decimal System: Entrepreneur and inventor Jay Walker's 25,000 books, manuscripts, artifacts and objects are organized in his personal 3,600-square-foot library "randomly, by color and height," he said. When he walks into his library, part of his Ridgefield, Conn., home, the room automatically "wakes up," glowing with theatrical lighting, music and LED-lit glass panels lining various walkways. He finds items to peruse by a system of memory, chance, and inspiration, he said.

The Walker Library of the History of the Human Imagination is a dramatic example of the rarest of residential amenities: A vast, personal, custom-built repository of intellectual stimuli. In the age of the e-reader, it is a status symbol on par with wearing a Patek Philippe watch when the cellphone already tells the time. For wealthy homeowners, personal libraries provide both a quiet refuge from the world and a playground for their minds—as well as a solution to the challenge of warehousing books from which they cannot bear to part.

But grand private libraries for hard-core book collectors come with daunting engineering and design challenges. To create enough shelf space and to counteract the visual heaviness of walls lined with books, private libraries may aim for two or more open stories. Mr. Walker's library, consisting of 3½ stories with one main floor and platforms and balconies at various levels, required framing the exterior walls with "a steel exoskeleton to hold up the room," said its architect, Mark Finlay of Southport, Conn. Mezzanine floors lined with book cases required steel framing, as did some wood bookshelves that carry heavy loads. There are some 25

staircases lined with panels of etched glass that depict important moments in the development of human invention. “It is designed to be intentionally disorienting,” said Mr. Walker.



Multicolored LED lighting bathes the Walker library, one of the ways that Walker has purposely made the space “disorienting.”  
PHOTO: DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



Jay Walker in his library. PHOTO: DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In Austin, Texas, Don Elledge, the 54-year-old chief executive of an information security company, recently completed construction of a 12,000-square-foot home with a library he estimates cost roughly \$4 million to build and fill with antiquarian books, antiques and research-grade astronomical equipment.

His architect, Austin-based

Luis Juaregui, said the biggest engineering challenge was stabilizing the \$300,000 telescope, positioned above the library, with a 30-inch diameter concrete pier embedded 15 feet into natural limestone beneath the house’s foundation. Isolating that pillar, and the telescope atop it, from the rest of the house is essential, said Mr. Elledge, because “any vibrations, even imperceptible ones, would degrade the image.” Also tricky: Cantilevering the wraparound catwalk lined with books. The solution came in the form of several narrow steel-tube columns, encased with decorative cast iron.

The private library is a classic example of a highly personal amenity that is expensive for the builder of a dream home to create and hard to recoup upon resale. Richard Clayton, 75, who

recently retired after owning an industrial construction company, built a 25,000-square-foot mansion in Paradise Valley, Arizona, six years ago for \$21 million (on top of a \$2.7 million lot purchase). He spent between \$500,000 and \$600,000 building a two-story, 1,200-square foot Honduran mahogany library to house his collection of first-edition books, which he had previously stored in part in his company's warehouses. Today, Mr. Clayton and his wife Donna are prepared to take a haircut, listing the house for just under \$15 million. Mr. and Ms. Clayton are looking to downsize but intend to take their book collection to their eventual new home. They aim to buy a property large enough so that they can either build a new two-story library in it, or turn a bedroom into a library.

Joan Levinson, the Clayton's listing agent, said a library is an asset when marketing this type of home. Karla Murtaugh, an agent with Neumann Real Estate and Christie's International in Ridgefield, Conn., said that libraries can provide a "hook" for a buyer with an intellectual or scholarly bent.

However, that doesn't mean the math on elaborate libraries adds up. Without having toured the home, Ms. Murtaugh estimated the value of Mr. Walker's nine-acre estate with a 27,000-square-foot mansion at roughly \$10 million. Mr. Finlay said that to recreate just the library—the physical structure, without the contents—today would cost roughly \$10 million.

Mr. Walker, 63, who declined to say what he has spent on his house or library, said he never plans to sell his home and that "the library has paid for itself by enriching my life 100 times over" since he built the home in the early 2000s. Mr. Walker, founder of Priceline.com, co-founder and CEO of Upside Travel and curator of TEDMED, the health and medicine version of the TED conference and talks, said the library has stimulated new ideas that have translated into an array of inventions and helped him make many new friends.

For some private library owners, especially those who aspire to world-class book collections, the serious expenditure isn't in the physical structure, but in the contents. "It is not uncommon for collectors at this level to be spending in excess of \$1 million a year" on books, said John Windle, owner of San Francisco bookstore John Windle Antiquarian Bookseller.

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## Libraries That Inspire

These spectacular rooms house the owners' collections of books, antiques, art and ephemera representing their unique, life-long passions and interests.



Richard and Donna Clayton built this two-story library in the custom home they completed in 2013 in Paradise Valley, Arizona. STEVE CRAFT FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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When Max Norris, a 65-year-old Singapore-based investor, bought a 22-acre estate in Devon, England, it was in need of new electric and plumbing systems and a cosmetic overall. But it came with a remarkable, huge, oak library. For nearly 240 years, the property had been the seat of the illustrious Coleridge family and their nearly 18,000 books, which Mr. Norris paid an additional \$129,000 to acquire. The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (of “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” fame) spent part of his childhood in the house, Mr. Norris said. In addition to Coleridge’s poetry, the family had between 400 and 500 bibles and religious texts, as well as about 100 books written in the Old Norse language, he said.

Mr. Norris added 4,000 books of his own and spent between roughly \$3.9 million to \$5.2 million updating the 22,000-square-foot main house. In recent years, while he and his wife live in Asia, his 30-year-old son Charles has occupied the property, which Mr. Norris characterized as “a bit





Richard and Donna Clayton built this two-story library in the custom home they completed in 2013 in Paradise Valley, Arizona.  
PHOTO: STEVE CRAFT FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



Mr. and Ms. Clayton in their library. PHOTO: STEVE CRAFT FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

too large for a bachelor pad.” The family has the property on the market now, seeking offers “over £7 million,” or roughly \$9.01 million. Mr. Norris said he will offer to sell the books to the home’s buyer.

While these libraries are entirely private, Mr. Walker and Mr.

Elledge offer local charities and school groups some access. Mr. Elledge allows physics students at a local school use of the telescope and has hosted astronomy groups in the observatory. Between 15 and 20 times a year, Mr. Walker and his wife, Eileen, donate tours of the library to auction events to raise money for local charities and schools. These go for between \$15,000 and \$50,000, said Mr. Walker, who guides up to 20 people on three-hours tours. For groups of kids, Mr. Walker has several “greatest hits” he likes to share, including a set of glass eyeballs dating to the Civil War, an Indonesian religious text printed on bark from 1650 describing cannibalism, and a rock from the planet Mars that he bought privately from an asteroid collector, Mr. Walker said. He encourages guests to pick up items and (gently) touch them, he said.

When he and his wife are no longer living, the books and objects can “re-enter the stream of commerce” and find new owners, Mr. Walker said. But, taking a page from his own imagination, he said that he hopes that before that time comes, three-dimensional scanning will have



Don Elledge and his wife, Iana, in their two-story library in Austin, Texas. PHOTO: CASEY WOODS FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

advanced to the point that the entire collection can be scanned and recreated on 3-D printers. The physical structure could also be captured in 3-D and viewed in virtual reality.

“Then anyone in the world could press ‘print’ and recreate anything in the library, as if they were here in it,” Mr. Walker said.

## LIBRARY DESIGN 101

### 1. Lighten

“Most homeowners want that rich, traditional brown stain in their library,” said Susie Marion, who designed Don Elledge’s library in Austin while working for his architect, and recently opened her own firm, Marion Interior Design. To counteract the “sea of brown,” she uses light rugs and makes the ceiling both light and interesting, with pale wallpaper or paint. Other tricks: Glass shelves and velvet furnishings, which catch glints of light, she said.

### 2. Fortify

“Many architects do not design the shelves to be thick enough, so they always get the bowing shelf,” said interior designer Timothy Corrigan, whose firm is located in Los Angeles and Paris. Shelves that span more than 36 inches need to be an inch-and-a-half or two-inches thick, Mr. Corrigan said. His firm also designed a metal support—steel, or if it will be noticeable, brass—that goes under book shelves to strengthen them.

### 3. Fill

Clients build libraries but often don’t have enough books to fill them out, said Mr. Corrigan. Juniper Books in Boulder, Colorado, specializes in assembling custom libraries, said founder Thatcher Wine. One of the most common requests is the “100 greatest books,” such as literary classics by Mark Twain and Jane Austen. Juniper also custom designs book covers that can be

organized together so that the spines of the books form an image or pattern. Custom covers start at \$350 per linear foot of books, with 10 books in a foot, Mr. Wine said.

## **Insurance for Precious Books**

Rare books, first editions and other literary treasures often need their own insurance policies, said Susan Michals, vice president of Michals Insurance Agency in Watertown, Mass., which specializes in finding insurance for clients with collections of fine art, coins, wine and rare books. A few considerations for insuring a library's contents:

### **1. Companies**

Traditional homeowners insurance companies typically do not have the ability to insure rare book collections—they don't have the expertise, Ms. Michals said. Instead, insurers who concentrate on high-net worth individuals, such as Chubb or AIG, and specialty insurers, including AXA XL, Berkley Asset Protection and Lloyd's of London, write such policies.

### **2. Costs**

Chubb said on average a rare book collection valued at \$100,000 would cost \$200 to \$500 to insure annually. A \$1 million collection would have average premiums ten times as high, said Laura Doyle, Chubb's fine art, jewelry and valuable collections manager. The benefit of a valuables policy is that it has no deductible and insures against vagaries specific to rare books, said Ms. Doyle. If one book in a set is damaged, for example, the policy would cover the loss of value to the entire set, she said.

### **3. Considerations**

Rare book insurers will sometimes come and inspect where a valuable collection lives, said Ms. Doyle. "We have a team in house that consults with clients about security, environmental control, minimizing temperature and humidity, and UV lighting," she said. Premiums may be higher in places with frequent hurricanes and other natural disasters, both Ms. Doyle and Ms. Michals said.

## **The care and feeding of old tomes**

Condition is paramount in the world of rare books. A first-edition of "The Great Gatsby" in a perfectly pristine dust jacket could fetch "at least \$250,000" while one with no dust jacket that is a bit worn might get about \$3,500, said John Windle, owner of San Francisco bookstore John Windle Antiquarian Bookseller. Mr. Windle and Thatcher Wine, founder of Boulder's Juniper Books, which assembles custom libraries and designs artistic book jackets, provided these tips for caring for the pages.

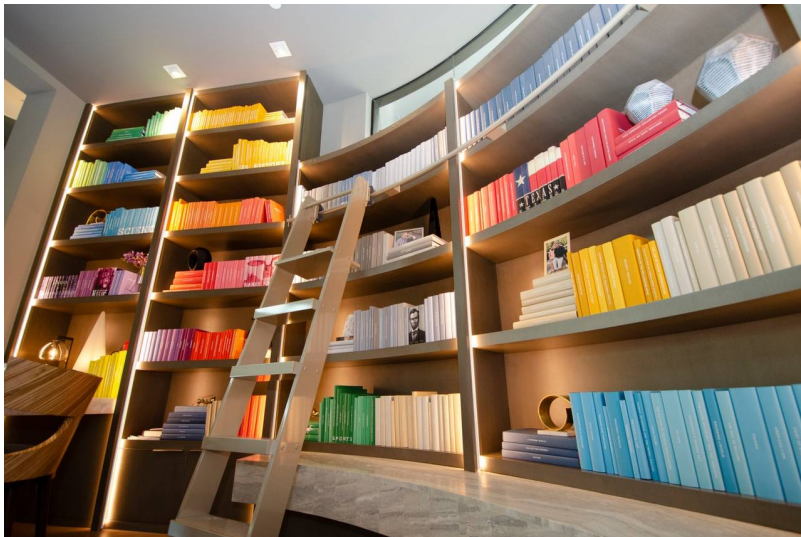
### **1. Light**

“Books of any value should be kept in rooms without direct sunlight. The difference after 20 years is astonishing,” Mr. Windle said. Mr. Wine advised treating windows with UV protection.

## 2. Temperature

“Books are like people,” in terms of the temperature and humidity they like the best, Mr. Windle said. 72 degrees and pleasant—think Los Angeles weather—is ideal.

## 3. Hygiene



Interior designers frequently use color-coordinated book covers to change the design aesthetic of a library. PHOTO: JUNIPER BOOKS

Books should be cleaned “as little as possible,” Mr. Windle said. Every 3 to 5 years, books with leather bindings should be rubbed with a very light application of “book leather dressing,” a product sold in library or museum gift shops or online. Cloth bindings should be lightly brushed with a soft cloth. To dust the top edges of a book, an old-fashioned shaving brush is ideal, he said.

## 4. Protection

Books in paper jackets should be covered by transparent book jacket covers sold by library supply firms. For the ultimate in safety, book binders can make transparent clamshell boxes, Mr. Windle said. They cost roughly \$125 to \$250 apiece, he said.

## 5. Big Chill

If bugs such as silverfish infiltrate a rare book, place it in a plastic bag and in the freezer for two to three days, advised Mr. Wine. The cold will both kill the bugs and draw humidity from the book, delaying the return of pests.

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