

Explore New England



Between the covers is where they live to be

Independence defines the browsers, the buyers, and the sellers whose shared capital is books

By Janet Mendelsohn
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Robert Kasow looks mighty relaxed for a small business owner, given the economic turmoil everywhere.

"I don't think I could re-create this business anyplace else," said the proprietor of Rivendell Books. "Montpelier is America the way it used to be."

The nation's smallest state capital, population 7,495, is home to four independent bookstores whose creaky floors and aisles of books continue to lure devoted customers. Visitors seeking local color can scope out downtown by foot in under an hour unless they linger over a cup at Capitol Grounds Coffee, research pellet stoves at Aubuchon Hardware, or debate vinyl vs. downloads over bins of vintage albums at Riverwalk Records. In this compact seat of government, merchants sell outdoor gear, crafts, and consignment goods, but there's no Barnes & Noble, no Starbucks, no McDonald's.

One recent Thursday, four writers arrived for a weekend in this city where we first met as midcareer students at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Four years later, we were back to celebrate "The Disorder of Longing," the first published novel by one of our own, Natasha Bauman, of Venice, Calif. Writer and editor Virginia Reiser from South Dennis met Bauman's plane in Burlington, while poet Kitty Forbes from Lookout Mountain, Ga., made the three-hour drive with me from Boston.

Checking into Betsy's Bed & Breakfast almost felt like coming home. As students, we had opted for Betsy's thick quilts and



Suzanne and William Arrand of Worcester, Vt., browse at Bear Pond Books in Montpelier; a sale wagon at The Book Garden; and on the corner, Rivendell Books.

MONTPELIER, Page M9



PHOTOS BY BILL GREENE/GLOBE STAFF

Their sanctuary can include your bed, your breakfast

By Ellen Albanese
GLOBE STAFF

When we were children, dozing off in church was a no-no. Even the grown-ups were obliged to sit up straight, face front, and keep an alert visage no matter how dull the sermon.

What a treat, then, to discover four former New England churches turned into comfortable inns, where falling asleep is not only tolerated but encouraged. Their innkeepers

have done a remarkable job of preserving historic structures while providing modern comforts. And they have clearly had fun repurposing ecclesiastical architecture and traditions for their overnight guests.

Belfry Inne & Bistro Sandwich

Looking at the Abbey of Belfry Inne is like looking at a painting by Picasso: All the pieces of the 1900

CHURCHES, Page M8



Once a Congregational church in Niantic, Conn.



PHOTOS BY ELLEN ALBANESE/GLOBE STAFF

At Belfry Inne in Sandwich, a transformed choir loft.

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