A woman with dark hair, wearing a black top and a leopard-print scarf, is sitting on a dark brown cushioned window seat. She is holding an open book and appears to be reading. The window seat is positioned in front of a large, multi-paned window that offers a view of a bright, sunny outdoor scene with green grass and a blue sky. To the left of the window seat is a white built-in bookshelf filled with various books. In the foreground, there are two armchairs with green and yellow striped upholstery. A red ottoman with a white polka-dot pattern is also visible in the lower-left corner. The overall atmosphere is bright and cozy.

RIVER & SHORE'S  
COASTAL  
HOMES

EARLY SPRING 2013





Melanie Stengel/New Haven Register photos

Roxanne Coady, owner of R.J. Julia Booksellers in Madison, curls up with a good book in her library in her Branford home.

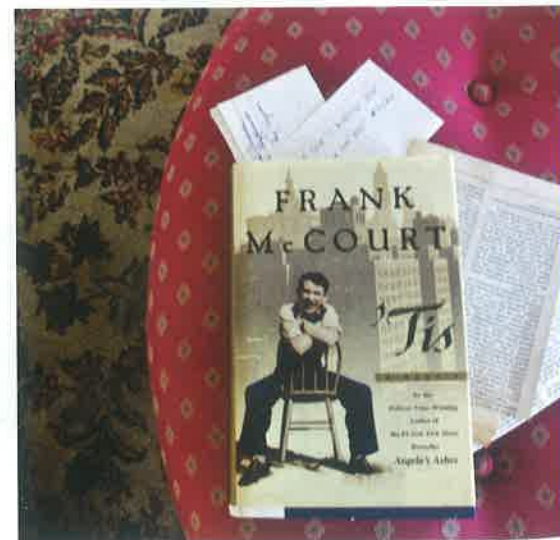
# A HOME LIBRARY SPEAKS VOLUMES

**In the digital age, Roxanne Coady reflects on a room filled with books**

By Lisa Reisman

**W**HEN HIS FAMILY HOME burned down in 1770, destroying his book collection, Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend that he would have felt less grief at losing the money he had spent on the books than he did in losing the books themselves.

No wonder. Like any book lover, Jefferson's weren't simply possessions. No doubt there were unfiltered comments in the margins responding to one idea or other and scraps of paper denoting certain passages to return to. No doubt the loss of those seemingly meaningless markings must have





seemed as though part of himself was irretrievably gone as well.

R.J. Julia Booksellers owner Roxanne Coady can empathize with Jefferson.

"Going back and looking at handwritten notes in a particular book, it's like listening to a song you haven't heard for a while," she said as she slid a well-thumbed copy of a hardback from the shelf of a bookcase in the living room of her stately Colonial in Branford's Indian Neck on a recent afternoon. "It takes you back to where you were when you first encountered it."

Not only that. "Having books around is a lot like being surrounded by old friends," said the petite, redoubtable 63-year-old, settling herself onto a window seat, the sunlight streaming in from the metallic sky above Long Island Sound on one of the coldest days of the year.

"Old friends you can count on to articulate what you want to express or somehow explain the inexplicable."

Friends like Ralph Waldo Emerson on "the independence of solitude" and Italo Calvino on the particular influence exercised by the classics and Diane Athill on the nature of evil. There's also Leo Tolstoy inhabiting one shelf alongside Mark Twain who stands back-to-back with Anne Tyler who nestles against John Updike.

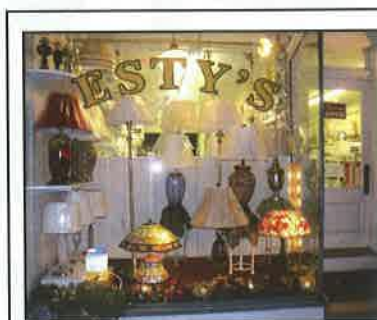
Their spines may be frayed and cracked, but the books exude a kind of well-worn glow, beautiful from the inside out. All of which lend to the effect of the whole, the way book-lined walls can be as decorative as artwork, the way they at once enliven a space, at the same time they radiate an atmosphere of warmth and intimacy.

And with Coady, the shoreline's bibliophile of all bibliophiles, a conversation about home libraries animates a conversation about a book she's spotted on one of her shelves that particularly captivated her, and then about how many wonderful books there are in the world, which leads to a discussion about the urgency of getting books into the hands of Connecticut's youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

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**Book-lined walls can be as decorative as artwork and enliven a space, creating a feeling of warmth and intimacy.**

Indeed, Coady, who for 15 years has been preaching the gospel of reading books to children with missionary zeal as a founder of the Read to Grow Foundation, a literary nonprofit based in Branford, seemed less than interested in the recent resurgence in popularity of the home library in the age of the iPad.

For the former Manhattan businesswoman, the bottom line is something far more utilitarian. "If books are around, it's more likely that you or your child will pick them up," she said. "And if the moment is right, it could ignite a passion in the child to read," introducing, in short, the physical book, as opposed to a program on a screen, as another means of learning about the world.

Add to that research showing that even one shelf of books in a home



**The exterior of Roxanne Coady's home on the shoreline in Branford.**



affords children a discernible advantage in school over those in a bookless home — specifically, those from the least-educated families — and it becomes clear that, as Coady puts it, “the presence of books, physical books, matters.”

Of course, considering the distractions of television, computers, iPads and smartphones — one estimate had the average American household with 10 or more screens — carving out the quiet time and space to sit down and read or be read to may be a challenge. Arguably, too, a home library, let alone a shelf of books, may not be within the means of many, much less a priority. And even for readers of books, the sheer convenience and efficiency of eBooks and Kindles are a given.

Still, there’s no denying that something gets lost in the translation, said Coady, an assertion supported by Nicholas Carr in “The Shallows.” According to Carr, “when a printed book is transferred to an electronic device ... its links and other digital enhancements propel the reader hither and yon,” shattering “the calm attentiveness the printed book encourages in the reader.”

Which may, ironically, explain the enduring draw of the physical book — even for some firmly ensconced in the digital generation. Take seventh-grader Jacob Gross. An avid reader and patron of R.J. Julia, he likes “turning the pages to find out what comes next. When I read,” he said, “it’s like I’m entering my own world.”

Which in turn may account for the growing appeal of home libraries. Reading a book in a dedicated space creates a quiet haven, a balm for the hectic pace of life, said Madison architect Duo Dickinson. And, even better, one might argue, a dedicated space like Coady’s, furnished with books collected over the course of many years, that comes to resemble an archaeological dig, with the potential, to borrow from Benjamin Zander in “The Art of Possibility,” of “rearranging us, creating surprising juxtapositions, emotional openings, startling presences, flight paths to the eternal.”

Even Thomas Jefferson would agree there’s no app for that.

*Lisa Reisman is a frequent contributor to the ShoreLine Times. Contact her at lisareisman27@gmail.com*



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