

FLOWER

DESTINATION: BEACON HILL BOOKS & CAFE

Far from a big box store experience, Beacon Hill Books & Cafe entices bibliophiles with beautifully appointed rooms in a historic Boston townhouse.



Front entry of Beacon Hill Books & Cafe includes topiaries in antique iron planters filled with flowers, plants, and trailing vines.

Opening a bookstore in the age of Amazon involves a leap of faith for sure, but buying an 1840s townhouse in need of significant renovation right before the pandemic requires an even heavier dose of perseverance. Enter the intrepid Melissa Fetter, a Dallas transplant to Boston's Beacon Hill and former vice president at J.P. Morgan. Like most entrepreneurs, she discovered a deficiency in this celebrated neighborhood and decided to make amends.

"Twenty-five years ago, there were three bookstores in Beacon Hill, but when my husband and I moved here in 2019, there were none," says Melissa. So when she saw a rare opportunity to purchase a property on coveted Charles Street, she jumped at the chance to reimagine the five-story, 1840s Greek Revival townhouse. "I always envisioned that the store would be in a townhouse, and I could picture people wandering from floor to floor and exploring nooks and crannies," says Melissa. "I wanted it to feel like you were in someone's personal home." To help bring her dreams to life, she reached out to local architect Monika Pauli of Pauli & Uribe Architects.



Farrow & Ball's Light Blue and Rectory Red combine with Sister Parish Serendipity wallpaper to bring fresh color and a joyful attitude to the book-filled rooms.

The design, which retained the original fireplaces and other architectural details, includes a café and an upstairs special events space with a long table that can seat up to 20 guests. In Melissa's quest to make Beacon Hill Books & Cafe a true destination, she engaged her longtime friend and collaborator, Dallas designer Cathy Kincaid, to impart an engaging, intimate atmosphere. "Melissa and I have worked on many homes together all around the country, and I absolutely love working with her," says Cathy. "She has a great eye and gives amazing attention to detail!"

Eschewing the predictable mahogany bookcases and dark-stained floors, the duo painted all the shelves and trim in Farrow & Ball colors such as Skylight and Light Blue. Cathy then chose a light finish for the floor to create a Scandinavian look. "There's still a traditional feel, but it's injected with a little pep," says Melissa. Every room is filled with signature Cathy Kincaid style—lots of blue tones with pops of red, custom fabric lampshades, engaging light fixtures, wicker furnishings, and a charming mix of prints.



Chairs and a settee in a Sister Parish botanical print (Palmetto) make perfect spots to perch.

“One of the most unique aspects of the store is the special events component,” says Melissa. “This space has beautiful high ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows.” Event planners have access to a variety of tablescapes, as well as the café’s curated specialty menus created by Chef Colleen Suhanosky. For those wanting a wine consultation, a sommelier from a nearby private club is available. In addition, the bookstore has engaged with floral designer Cailla Quinn of Ephemirus to create special arrangements tailored to each event.



The petite door makes the children’s floor a true destination.



A custom-colored Sister Parish striped wallpaper lines the stairwell.

To add an even more custom appeal to the interiors, Melissa and Cathy chose Sister Parish Design as the exclusive wallpaper and fabric purveyor for the project. “I have worked with Susan Crater and her team at Sister Parish for years, and they are very skilled at doing custom colors, which I employ frequently in my designs,” says Cathy. Melissa appreciated the history of the firm and that it’s been women-run for four generations. (Susan is the granddaughter of Sister Parish, and she resurrected the esteemed company in 2000. Her daughter, Eliza Harris, joined the team in 2018.) “They walk a fine line between traditional and contemporary, which these spaces needed,” says Melissa. “I’ve enjoyed their products in my own homes as well.”



Floral designer Cailla Quinn lined the events table with hydrangeas. The mantel arrangement is filled with Hypericum, roses, ranunculus, variegated pittosporum, plumosa ferns, blue tweedia, and crab apple and pear branches.

It’s clear that Beacon Hill Books & Cafe is anything but typical. “It’s much more ‘done up,’ ” says Melissa. “My hope is that people will enter ready to engage with the books and then leave with a smile on their faces. This place is meant to be cheerful and fun.”