

Looking for romance? Check your local bookstore.

For her new book, author Judith Rosen interviewed 24 couples who wed or got engaged at bookstores, and in Boston, the trend is just heating up

By **Haley Clough** Globe Correspondent, Updated February 22, 2025, 6:00 a.m.



What better way to write your life's next chapter than between stacks of books?

Cambridge author Judith Rosen asked herself the same question when writing ["Bookstore Romance: Love Speaks Volumes,"](#) a compilation of 24 couples who proposed or tied the knot in bookstores. The book, released on Feb. 1 by [Brandeis University Press](#), includes images of elaborate engagements in front of bestseller displays and newlyweds posed in front of intricately built arches of books.

Rosen's editor suggested the story, inspired by [the surge in romance booksellers](#) and the "inventive way people had of creating a romantic moment in a bookstore." Seeing pictures on social media of people getting married in such romantic literary locations "made [my editor's] heart zing," Rosen said.

Rosen, the former bookselling editor at Publishers Weekly, says romance and bookstores seem to go hand-in-hand lately; some have even gone exclusive. According to a July article in The New York Times, the number of US bookstores dedicated to romance novels has steadily climbed from just two into double digits in the last two years. Local additions include [Harvard Square's Lovestruck Books](#), which opened in December, Malden-born pop-up [Read My Lips](#), and [Grump and Sunshine](#), which opened in 2023 in Belfast, Maine.

"I think during the [COVID-19 pandemic], people just wanted something to make them happy," Rosen said. [Reading romance](#), she said, offered a tonic.

But now, it's not just the love stories on the shelves stealing the spotlight — IRL romance, happening *inside* bookstores, is having a moment of its own.

In "Bookstore Romance," Rosen explores the ways booksellers and the betrothed have come together in unlikely and surprising ways, from one bride's "Beauty and the Beast" dream come true to a surprise proposal between the Psychology and Self-Help sections. While most pairs share a love for literature, others — on and off the pages of Rosen's

book — have sought out booksellers who also align with core values, such as building and rebuilding community.

“People are becoming more socially aware of their place in the world. They want to give back, they want to do something unique, they don’t want to go the traditional route anymore,” said Liz Saul, associate director of events at booksellers and literary nonprofit More Than Words.

Saul said the bookstore wedding movement is the “new bread and butter” of multi-location, youth-run stores. Their South End location reemerged from the lull of the pandemic as a popular spot for gatherings, hosting more than 20 weddings since “coming back to life as an event space” in 2023.

Many couples who were drawn to the space value the organization’s mission of supporting and empowering youth, but for some, “their first date was in a bookstore, or they have some sort of special connection to [bookstores] to begin with,” Saul explained.

For Kaylah Dixon and Nick Hammes, it was both. The couple met as undergrad students living on the North Shore, and began dating during a production of “Urinetown,” bonding over their love of the arts. In 2020, they postponed their wedding, eventually marrying in 2022 at More Than Words, after Kaylah’s job in community theater connected her with the organization.

The couple resonated with the nonprofit’s youth program and advocacy efforts and the literary element it would bring to their celebration.

“I love looking at a bookshelf and just picking something off of it and getting lost somewhere ... and you think, ‘I can’t wait to share this with the people around me,’” Hammes said.

A setup for a potential wedding at More Than Words in Boston's South End. @WARRENLANEPHOTOGRAPHY

On their big day, the two wanted to encapsulate their love of all kinds of media — film, books, musicals, and plays — and created a display dedicated to the favorites that shaped them through the years. Titles included “The Color Purple,” “Twelfth Night,” “Homegoing,” “Mamma Mia!,” the “Avatar” DVDs, and “Me and Earl and the Dying Girl.” Authors and playwrights the couple admired dictated the seating arrangements.

For Melissa Fetter, owner, and Serena Hanlin, private events coordinator, of [Beacon Hill Books & Cafe](#), just because a wedding is in a bookstore doesn’t mean the fanfare of a traditional celebration needs to be forgone. A wedding reception or a proposal at the Charles Street bookstore can be low-key or exclusive, depending on a couple’s preferences and budget.

The [five-story bookstore](#), which opened in 2022, first emerged as a popular proposal location. This, according to Fetter, happens in two ways: “We have [elaborate] proposals where someone is paying to use the space and the store for that purpose, and then we have the rogue proposals where all of a sudden we’ll hear someone squealing, and they’ve brought a friend along to take a picture,” she said. Sometimes, the impromptu proposals go unknown to the staff, “but [proposals] happen with surprising frequency ... probably around once a month.”



Beacon Hill Books + Cafe. BEACON HILL BOOKS + CAFE ?

Those who want more personalized experiences can pay \$250 per hour for exclusive use of the space for the proposal and a photo shoot after the store's regular closing hours, Fetter said.

The location itself can also be reserved and rented for wedding celebrations, including rehearsal dinners, bridal showers, and receptions. These private events include staffing (such as a sommelier and servers), table settings, and floral arrangements, often made by Hanlin herself. A wedding celebration will typically cost around \$10,000, according to Fetter.

“The experience of having the whole bookstore as your private space — it feels like you're at someone's family home,” Hanlin said. “One of my favorite compliments that we get at the dinners is ‘It's even more beautiful than I could have imagined.’ That's my gold standard, I always want to hear that.”

In the case of Morgan Brewton-Johnson and Sam Hall, the couple was looking for something “quintessentially Boston” for their small local wedding. Brewton-Johnson had learned about Beacon Hill Books from one of her graduate school professors, and it became a go-to spot for the couple.



A wedding dinner setup inside of Beacon Hill Books + Cafe, a bookstore on Charles Street that can be rented for private events and celebrations. BEACON HILL BOOKS + CAFE?

For their October wedding, the two spent the morning together — exchanging vows and rings on the couch at home — before taking an Uber to the bookstore to greet their 20-so guests.

“[The wedding day] is the way I would have wanted to spend every single day anyway, so it was nice that we got to do that on the day we committed ourselves to each other with our friends and family,” said Brewton-Johnson. Guests were each given a book, handpicked by the couple, as a wedding favor.

So, are bookstore weddings the start of a happily ever after? Rosen thinks so.

“To be surrounded by stories, it’s kind of a lovely way to begin the story of your life together,” said Rosen. “Combining the stories, the beauty of the bookstore, I think it’s just so nice. I know I’m biased ... but the people in bookstores are so lovely.”

Judith Rosen will discuss “Bookstore Romance: Love Speaks Volumes” with author Laura Zigman at [Lovestruck Books](#), 44 Brattle St., Cambridge, on Feb. 27 at 7 p.m.

Haley Clough can be reached at haley.clough@globe.com.

[Show comments](#)