

Home libraries

CARLI PHILIPS

TOP SHELF

Classic embraces a new chapter as designers focus on reading rooms with decorative distinction and modern twist



JUSTIN ALEXANDER

Above: The Bakery by Anna-Carin; and right, Kennedy Nolan Architecture's work on libraries at homes in Melbourne



DEREK SWALWELL

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nigmatic fashion designer and obsessive bibliophile Karl Lagerfeld amassed a collection of 300,000 books throughout his lifetime. An avid collector, he spent about €700,000 (\$1.2m) per year buying them and even opened a bookstore and publishing house, Librairie 7L, in Paris.

It stands to reason that someone with that many books would need somewhere to keep them and for Lagerfeld, it was a separate room with a catwalk, wheeled ladders and a spiral staircase to reach the uppermost shelves. "I hate leisure," he once said. "Except reading."

No longer just a thing of the past, architects are increasingly receiving requests for spaces exclusively reserved for reading and relaxing.

Contrary to popular opinion, Kindles and other tablets have not made paper and print obsolete. In fact, device-free zones are core to the brief.

When architect Sean Godsell built a stand-alone studio at his Kew home in Melbourne, it was intended to be a "quiet, tech-free space to draw, write and read in peace".

While there are other bookshelves in the house, "the box" was an easy-to-access place for Godsell's large collection of architecture books.

"There is something nurturing and reassuring about the silence of this space," says the architect, who has designed various home libraries over the years. Most recently, he designed one in South Yarra with enough shelving to store 1000 books.

"It's a dedicated reading room that deliberately provides a quiet space with no technology. The room is wrapped by floor-to-ceiling shelves in warm blackbutt and the restored fireplace anchors the space nicely. We wanted the library to be a snug, comforting, nurturing and peaceful room," Godsell says.

In 2021, London's Crawshaw Architects transformed an old cow shed in Dorset into a library-cum-study pavilion for their clients' collection of rare books on Palladian architecture. A modern twist on the classic library, it features twin aisles and barrel-vaulted naves in solid oak panels.

Forgoing cracked spines and well-worn



NICHOLAS WILTON

Architect Sean Godsell's library for a client in South Yarra; and below, Crawshaw Architects designed this home library in an old cow shed in Dorset, UK

pages, a slew of companies now offer services to curate new, bespoke home libraries.

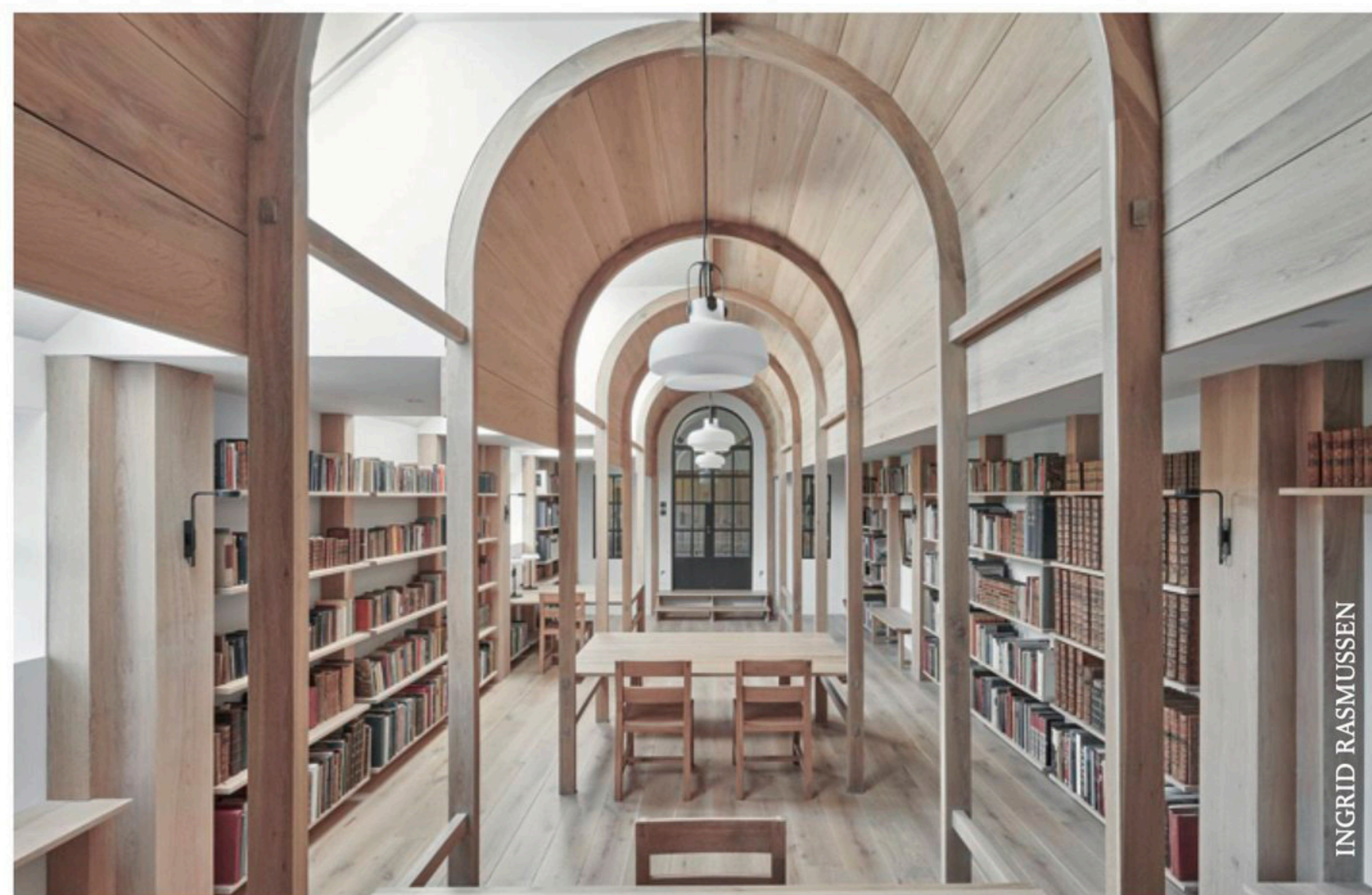
US-based Juniper Custom creates one-of-a-kind libraries tailored to their client's personal preferences. Founder Thatcher Wine says that home bookshelves needn't just reflect tomes that have been read, but can also simply be decorative objects in themselves.

Referred to as the "book curator to the stars" (Gwenyth Paltrow is a client), Wine presents books as home decor to be arranged for visual appeal. Whether they are aspirational books or of sentimental value, "there is no shame in keeping books just because they look good," says Wine. "In the fast-paced, digitally saturated, screen-overloaded era we live in ... printed books are a refuge of space and time."

Lagerfeld's Librairie 7L business also offers a "Build a Library" service for customers based on their personal taste, and pioneering French coffee table book publishers, Assouline, have introduced their own design service that includes the whole shebang – from books to carpets, fixtures and tables.

Ultimate Library in the UK works with hotels and private clients on everything from the design concept to library curation, installation and "book refreshment". They also collaborate with interior designers and architects to plan new collections, installing and styling them with objects and art.

In their own way, even the TikTok



INGRID RASMUSSEN

generation is getting in on the action. Architectural Digest has just hailed #bookshelfwealth as 2024's first design trend. Defined by built-in bookshelves with a lived-in, nonchalant attitude, Bookshelf Wealth is the styling of bookshelves mixed in with intentionally curated pieces.

For a house they designed in Melbourne's

Elsternwick, Kennedy Nolan Architecture created a dedicated reading room for their client's vast collection, some of which had been handed down over generations. The warm timber shelving has the capacity to hold more than 3000 books.

Synonymous with more traditional libraries, the rolling ladder is a hugely evocative object

says Patrick Kennedy, principal of Kennedy Nolan Architecture.

"It reminds us of a time when books were the principal repository of knowledge, but it is also fundamentally practical because it is a convenient way to get to the higher shelves safely and easily," he says.

For another one of their residential projects, the architects created a multi-use library with the capacity to hold about 1000 books for the owner's four children – in addition to their friends and neighbours – to enjoy.

Given that the library was an important part of both his client's briefs, they have emerged as "distinct and elevated rooms".

From the decorative trend of grouping spines by colour to the official Dewey Decimal system, living with large collections of books means organisation is necessary.

In the converted residential bakery she designed in Sydney, Anna-Carin of Anna.Carin Design Studio designed 100 lineal metres of exposed plywood shelving so that the titles – categorised by language for her polyglot clients – would be easy to find.

"The room is designed for focus. It's for reading, listening to music on the record player and sitting by the fireplace," she says.

Rather than distributing books throughout the house, the home library is an escape room of sorts, a place for quiet, free from the distractions of the outside world.