



THE  
BOOKSHOP  
BOOK

THE OFFICIAL BOOK OF  
BOOKS  
ARE MY  
BAG  
2014

Jen Campbell

*Sunday Times* bestselling author of

WEIRD THINGS CUSTOMERS  
SAY IN BOOKSHOPS

## • A CHAT WITH KAT ZHANG •

Author of the *Hybrid Chronicles: What's Left of Me* and its sequels.

“ When I was younger I didn't visit bookstores nearly as much as libraries. But I've been lucky to have some wonderful indie bookstores near me these past few years. Back in Nashville, where I used to live, there was Parnassus. I did some of my first book events there, and I just love the atmosphere – everything from the stars hanging down from the ceiling to the genres written on chalkboards over the tall shelves. Here in Atlanta, where I now live, I'm particularly partial to the Little Shop of Stories. It's really amazing how much they do for the community, not only as a place to buy books, but also as a place for local kids to have summer camps and reading groups and meet their favorite authors. ”



### The Alabama Booksmith, Birmingham

Jake Reiss's Alabama Booksmith is pretty unique in that it only stocks signed copies. All the books are face out on the shelves, too, so you can see them properly.

As of 1990, Jake was the only male member of his family for two generations not to be a bookseller – so he decided to change that.

'The fact that my oldest son and younger brother were both booksellers had no effect,' he jokes. 'However, when my youngest son opened a used bookstore, after managing a large operation in San Francisco, this appeared a great way to make lots of money and meet girls. That did influence me to open our shop.'

In 1999 they moved to a new location. 'At first sight family, friends and customers saw a dilapidated, deserted office building hidden from sight by wild trees, vines and weeds,' says Jake. 'We saw a cosy bookstore

with a fireplace, ice-cold water fountain, custom-made shelves and counters, immaculate rest rooms, office and storage space to squander, and 125 parking spaces.

‘We bought that ugly duckling, and after bulldozing, replacing the floor and ceilings, hiring a master woodcraftsman, replacing the plumbing and doubling the existing square footage with a new building for office and storage, the beautiful swan was ready to spread its wings in ninety days. Then there was this minor problem of transporting 100,000 books. Forty customers volunteered, and the all-new and improved Alabama Booksmith opened as our dream store.

‘The bookshop has taken over my life. I’ve become a very boring person who works ten to twelve hours a day, and then goes home and reads. Only a small percentage of all readers have any interest in the upper-level literary fiction and non-fiction titles we select, and fewer still really care if a copy is hardback or paperback, first edition or later printing, and signed or unsigned. However, that tiny little group we target is tenacious and, as far as we know, we’re the only bookstore on the planet that carries exclusively signed copies at regular price. The result is that we have customers in all fifty states and dozens of international purchasers.’



### **Book People, Austin, Texas**

I am forever impressed by Book People in Austin, which is the largest bookshop in the state of Texas, and for the past fifteen years has been voted best bookstore in town. The owner, Steve Bercu, has customers that love the bookshop so much it’s able to sell its own merchandise (pens, T-shirts, mugs... you name it; they have it).

There is a massage chair in the middle of the shop; the cookery section is peppered with fridges and other kitchen utensils; the teenage section is carefully separate from the children’s section (Steve jokes that it’s painted black to heighten feelings of angst); and they hold birthday parties in the bookshop two or three times a week. They host 400 author