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COLLECTING

In search of pages from the past

Book lovers can shell out thousands to recapture a literary moment in time.

By Kathleen Phalen

In a culture where even supermarkets hawk the latest "Harry Potter" best seller, books are hip accessories again. Among the hottest: hard-to-find, often out-of-print books that recapture moments in our personal history and reflect new-found pop status.

"Baby boomers are now interested in owning the artifacts of their youth, the books that shaped their generation and the feelings these books represent," says Marci Crossan, of

[Abebooks.com](#), which bills itself as the largest online marketplace for used, rare and out-of-print books, listing more than 40 million books from 10,000

independent booksellers. They aren't alone; nearly every major book chain has a used-book division. First editions of classics like Irma Rombauer's "The Joy of Cooking", Dr. Seuss' "Cat in the Hat" or Stephen King's "Carrie" can sell for thousands.

They don't even have to be old to be in demand. Used copies of the "Harry Potter" series are boosting sales for the secondhand-book market and helping smaller used-book sellers profit from Pottermania. Crossan says sales of the first four "Potter" books soared 300% in the first two weeks of "Order of the Phoenix"'s June release. (A signed galley proof of 1999's "The Prisoner of Azkaban" recently listed for \$1.2 million, she adds.)

A sampling of 1st-edition prices*

\$35,000	The Catcher in the Rye , J.D. Salinger (1951), signed
\$2,812	Hardy Boys' The Tower Treasure (1927)
\$13,215.21	The Cat in the Hat , Dr. Seuss (1957)

*[Abebooks.com](#) prices at press time

Americans' love of everything retro has made pop literary icons like Nancy Drew bigger than ever. A Midwestern university recently placed a large order for the Hardy Boys series from Tavistock Books in Alameda, Calif., says owner Vic Zoschak.

But finding an out-of-print book isn't always easy. Sleuthing traditionally meant scouring book shops, attics, garage and estate sales, auctions, church basements and library discard bins. The Internet has made it easier: Online used-book sales now rake in about \$700 million a year in the United States and Canada. Be warned: Before you buy a pricey book sight unseen, first ask for proof of its authenticity and condition.

Tracking down old books often leads to good stories. Take London bookseller June Hudson, who helped a couple find a favorite book an aunt had lent someone years earlier. When Hudson handed it over, the wife "looked inside the cover, saw her aunt's name and shrieked." California sleuther Chris Volk (bookfever.com) tracked down a book for a man whose mother had read it many times while nursing his father through cancer. "The book meant so much to her," Volk says. "When his mother was ill, he wanted a copy for her."

And used books are a boon for amateurs and connoisseurs alike. "You can find an old copy of 'The Great Gatsby' for 10 cents or a signed first edition for \$100,000," Crossan says. "One version appeals to a reader, and another, a collector."

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