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## In a book bind?

### Getting your collection organized requires some tough decisions and a little creativity

05:40 PM CST on Sunday, January 30, 2005

By **BARBARA RODRIGUEZ / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News**

The love affair starts innocently enough. Maybe *Runaway Bunny* was your constant childhood companion. Next thing you know, it's been 10 years and three moves since college and you still can't part with your *Riverside Shakespeare*—never mind that it weighs more than your TV. About the time you realize your book club collection dates back to another century you—gasp!—marry a book person. Together you build tottering towers on bedside tables, toilet tanks, hamster cages, microwave ovens, the baby's changing table. It's time for an intervention.

## Love, cherish, or let go

Books are meant to be read. The books you loved but no longer look at deserve better. Let them go. Take a deep breath. We're not talking about throwing them away (the horror!). We're talking resale. Think Half-Price Books. The locally born company was built on the premise that "books should fill our lives not our landfills," says spokeswoman Kirk Thompson.

Like a good mental health worker, she knows how to soothe the fears of the print-addicted. Employees there can help you stem your rising tide of books—without ever being judgmental. They won't even blink at yet another copy of *The DaVinci Code*. So pack up the years of "vacation reading" (Danielle Steele, John Grisham) in the confidence that they will "take anything but yesterday's newspaper and phone books."

Keep in mind that you'll get more for a very recent best seller than you will an old paperback.

Also, keep an eye out for other secondhand book shops in your neighborhood. If you have a large collection, it might be worth a little comparison shopping.

## Know when to hold 'em

Ms. Thompson suggests holding on to rare, unusual or first editions; sentimental favorites you read time and again; and titles that support ongoing passions such as sports, cooking, special collections.

To determine if a book is a first edition, look on the copyright page for the words "First Edition" or "First Printing." Or look for the words "First Published" followed by a month and/or year—if that same date is on the title and copyright page you may have a first edition, but not always. Subsequent editions may have been published the same year.

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Other things that influence a book's desirability include early titles by a well-known author; signed and/or limited editions; books that have won a literary prize (generally, literary authors are more collectible than popular authors).

If you think you have a "find," try looking the book up at [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.addall.com](http://www.addall.com). Once you make sure your book matches the edition and description of the listings (and you have considered its condition), Ms. Thompson says, "take the price with a grain of salt, since these are asking prices: the books listed may never sell for that price."

## Go on, judge by the cover

If you want to love your books in a new way, ferret out books by subject and use them as part of your decor. Pile them in pillars to display your collections of sports memorabilia or line cookbooks up between copper pots or crockery as a kitchen display.

Stack art and photography books flat, spines out on coffee tables, mantels, end tables and antique secretaries. Books interspersed thematically with folk art or memorabilia look great (and getting them off the shelves actually encourages perusal).

## More solutions

Interior decorator Sue Ritzman suggests putting stacks of books to work as a table or shelf. Stack the volumes in two pillars of even height (say, under a window ledge) and top with a piece of glass or a shelf. She also suggests building a window box topper, "just like making a cornice, but leave it open to store books inside." She suggests that books that aren't in frequent use be stored.

"I love containers for books! Just display the books that are most often used and store the remaining in decorative bins. You can find these at Pottery Barn, Container Store (all colors and styles) and Target, or you could make your own with fabrics to match your decor."

Elizabeth Sankarsingh, whose career in the book buying business has meant a steady adoption of books – "and I don't even collect anything in particular" – likes to keep old favorites in antique trunks. Others she keeps on her shelves, organized by subject and alphabetized by author. "If I bring home something really cool, I put it on my desk or coffee table for everyone to see and enjoy when they come over."

Dallas designer Allen Kirsch offers a twist: He installs duplex outlets at the bottom of every bank of bookcases. The duplexes work on a dimmer switch and when the room's lamps are turned on, the books are lit, too. Lights allow you to see books otherwise forgotten on the shelves.

## If you must, store them

Obvious storage places can hurt books, so, avoid hot attics and damp basements. Ms. Thompson suggests storing books in temperature-controlled environments, wrapped in acid-free paper and stacked flat. Before you store, flip through the book's pages and sweep away any crumbs left over from reading while eating, or anything that looks like poppy seeds (possible insect eggs).

"I can't tell you how many great books I've seen that were ruined because they were thrown in a box and put in a hot attic," book-buyer Ms. Sankarsingh says. "The pages are all brown and yellow, the spines are broken and they're filled with bug eggs."

*Barbara Rodriguez is a Fort Worth freelance writer.*

## Find more time for reading

Although Victor Kralisz, manager of the humanities and fine arts division of the Dallas Public Library system, spends his days reading about books – to order all the things we should be reading – he still finds the time to read for pleasure. He compares it with finding time to exercise.

"If you really want to do it, you find the time," he says. "And it's not necessarily significant time. Finding the time to read one book a month is a good place to start."

**Keep a book with you** in your purse, briefcase and car for times you are left waiting in line, for the movie to start, picking up children or in a doctor's office. And keep a couple of books that appeal to different interests on your bedside table. Read for 10 to 15 minutes each night before you go to sleep.

"Once you get in the habit you do it not because you have to, but because you want to," Mr. Kralisz says.

**Join a book club.** Mr. Kralisz heads a fiction book group that meets for discussion once a

month. For information, call him at 214-670-1668. Your local bookstore may also have book clubs you can join.

**Raise a reader.** Kirk Thompson of Half-Price Books suggests that if you want your kids to put down the video games and pick up a book, you have to make them accessible.

"Keep a basket of the books they love near the television or other toys. You'll be surprised how often they will pick one up," she says.

**Look beyond traditional bookshelves** to store your collection. Dallas designer Sue Ritzman suggests building a high shelf over a window to add space.

-B.R.

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