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# The Most Beautiful Libraries In The World



THE MOST BEAUTIFUL **LIBRARIES** IN THE WORLD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GUILLAUME DE LAUBIER TEXT BY JACQUES BOSSER FOREWORD BY JAMES H. BELLINGTON, THE LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS



## Synopsis

Profiles more than 20 of the most historic libraries from 12 countries, all of them architectural landmarks. Text provides comprehensive history of libraries.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Guillaume de Laubier is one of France's foremost photographers of interior design. He has undertaken projects all over the world for magazines such as *Elle Décoration*, *Architectural Digest*, and *Madame Figaro*. Jacques Bosser, journalist and translator, has written for *Architectural Digest* and *Connaissance des Arts* as well as contributing to *Le Dictionnaire international des arts appliqués et du design* and *Le Dictionnaire international du bijou*. James H. Billington has been the Librarian of Congress for more than 15 years.

This hefty coffee table book presents the origins of some of the most distinguished and beautiful libraries around the world. There are only 23 libraries featured in here but I found the selection to be well-made, though it focuses almost exclusively on the great libraries in Europe, one in Russia, and several from the United States. Bibliophiles will particularly appreciate the beautiful color photographs of these amazing repositories of knowledge and learning, showcasing old structures that reflect Gothic and other styles. Aside from the photographs (most of which are full page), the book also details each library's history. I was fascinated to learn how the renowned Bodleian Library in Oxford came about. Up until 1598, Oxford University did not really have a library to speak of, due largely to mismanagement, censorship in the form of purging of any text with references to

Catholicism, and more. It was only in 1598 that a man named Thomas Bodley came upon the scene and spent years creating a proper library in Oxford. The libraries featured here are: National Library of Austria - Vienna, Austria  
The Benedectine Abbey Library of Admont - Admont, Austria  
The Monastic library at Wiblingen - Ulm, Germany  
The Benedictine Abbey Library of Metten - Metten, Germany  
The Herzogin Anna Amalia Library - Weimar, Germany  
The Vatican Library - Rome, Italy  
Riccardiana Library - Florence, Italy  
The Mazarine Library - Paris, France  
The Institute Library - Paris, France  
The Senate Library - Paris, France  
The Cabinet Des Livres of the Duc D'Aumale - Chantilly, France  
The Abbey Library of St. Gall - Saint Gall, Switzerland  
Bodleian Library - Oxford, England  
Wren Library, Trinity College - Cambridge, England  
The John Rylands Library - Manchester, England  
Trinity College Library - Dublin, Ireland  
The National Library - Prague, The Czech Republic  
The Library of the Royal Monastery of El Escorial - San Lorenzo del Escorial, Spain  
The National Palace Library in Mafra - Mafra, Portugal  
Boston Athaenaeum - Boston, USA  
The Library of Congress - Washington, DC, USA  
The New York Public Library - NY, USA  
The National Library of Russia - St. Petersburg, Russia

The title of this book sums up its contents, although it should be noted that these are hardly all of the most beautiful libraries in the world, but are an excellent selection among them. They are, understandably, monuments of Western civilization with the result being that the libraries are primarily European with some American examples. Each is covered in sufficient detail with excellent color photography. It is truly a delightful coffee-table book.

SOME OF the most beautiful libraries, indeed. Don't worry about what isn't here and just enjoy what is. The pics are large (often a spread) so you don't miss out on wonderful details. A few locations seemed like buildings ornamented with books vs "defined by" but ok, it's still great eye candy. The only gripe I will put front and center is omission of Coimbra (both historical and breathtakingly beautiful) -- perhaps it's been too "done".

I buy a lot of books like this for specific room purposes. We were going to build, bought instead and are remodeling. Most books of this kind I expect to be impressed by, if I'm lucky, 50% of what's presented. Not so with this book. I was extremely impressed with nearly every library depicted with the exception of the US libraries (hmmm, I wonder what that says about us?). Of course, with monarchies who can divert monies wherever they like, this is the result you'll find in European / Eastern block libraries. Regardless of my snarky attitude, the results of what can be done with

unlimited architecture, fine artisans and time is very well represented here. I also bought the book for my mother who is a librarian and she was equally impressed. If you like libraries and their architecture, I feel certain you will enjoy this book.

Gorgeous. Great pictures. Wonderful libraries. Makes us proud to think that people would love books so much.

"The Most Beautiful Libraries in the World" is kept on the fireplace mantelpiece in our library for people to come and view. I liked the book so much I bought my father it for Valentine's Day. He has visited many libraries and gone on library tours in Europe, so the pictures brought back many memories for him and reminded him of how our ancestors treasured libraries and kept the books in good condition. Anybody who is a library connoisseur will enjoy this book. As written in the introduction, "One must spend hours upon hours, and days upon days in the cocoon of a great library in order to understand and love the cozy isolation that it can provide. Some people will never break away from its spell and remain eternal readers, having lost the desire to discover the real world. Others will know how to find in libraries both knowledge and its instruments." Enjoy Cynthia Nakai

The libraries presented here exude supreme reverence for the book and its contents as towering human achievements. One is hard-pressed to doubt the immortality of the texts contained within each binding. Despite the lofty craftsmanship of the art, architecture and the bindings themselves, they have served their purpose only if a reader has been invited, if not lured, to match their dignity. Invest the requisite exertion and time to read and contemplate the knowledge of great books, and you will find the lavishness of even these libraries lacking. Their material riches are first and foremost a catalyst for the enrichment of the soul through the act of reading.

If you are not a world-hopping traveler, this book is a fine introduction to many countries of the world, and how they regard the presentation of the written word. Many world libraries are as fine as any cathedral, and these full color plates, some with double fold-outs, are stunning. A very fine coffee table book, with text that includes the history of each building, plus an accounting of how great book collections come to be. Well worth buying.

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