OPEN BOOKS

Carving out a community among the Atlanta stacks

BY CAROLINE EUBANKS

A new crop of bookstores has popped recently, such as Sincerely Yours in Smyrna. They hope to offer readers community and comfort.

COURTESY OF SINCERELY YOURS

In an era of book bans, Atlanta's bookstores matter more than ever. A new wave of shops focuses on specific interests and identities, creating desirable third spaces and building community.

"The benefit of having a brick-and-mortar is that people have a place to go, and people have a place to hang out, and people have a place to connect," says Kate McNeil, owner of Kirkwood's romance bookstore **All the Tropes**, the first of its kind in the city. "I wanted to work and live in my neighborhood, and I just had this vision of the community it would create." It opened in August 2024, following a nationwide rise in the romance genre, and McNeil employs people from her neighborhood for graphic design, painting, and other needs and has made it a cozy place to unwind.

It's a sentiment reflected by the owners of the newly debuted **Sincerely Yours** in Smyrna. Helmed by best friends Mallory Gay and Madison Glines, the store styled in vintage decor has a chock-full calendar of author signings, themed craft nights, and coffee pop-ups to support fiction genres such as romance, thrillers, literary fiction, and nonromantic fantasy. "We wanted to create more than a bookstore. Our vision is to have a place where you can hang out, meet new friends, and engage in the community," says Glines. "We knew it was important to have a place where women felt comfortable and safe buying books that might be considered taboo in certain environments."

Beyond comfort, some bookstores hope to offer readers a safe space. **The Lavender Bookshop** in Marietta exclusively carries books by authors who feature LGBTQ+ characters or stories across a variety of genres. "I've purposefully set up my store in a way that leaves areas for people to just spend time, even if they aren't shopping," says owner Sara Williford, who opened the store in 2024. "It gives them a place to be comfortable and meet others."

Books & Brew opened as a hybrid book bar in Tucker last year as a place for the neighborhood to gather beyond the traditional bar and club scene. It serves a selection of beer, wine, tea, and coffee, along with fare such as charcuterie boards and protein bowls. "It needed to be a place where people could feel like they were home," says Quinelle Bhandari, who owns Books & Brew along with her husband, Nate, and her mother, Irene Bethelmie.

The same goes for Grace and Tyler Smith, who opened **Wild Aster Books** in Chamblee earlier this year. They wanted to create a beloved adult- and child-friendly space in their neighborhood. "I envisioned it to be kind of like the attic in *Little Women,* super whimsical, and have that Victorian vibe to it," says Grace.

As Atlanta continues to expand its bookstore scene, these spaces become even more sacred. "I think the resurgence of bookstores reflects a deep desire among consumers for tangible, meaningful experiences," says Gay from Sincerely Yours. "It's about more than just books. It's about belonging."

BOOK IT

Literary events to add to your calendar this year

Georgia Indie Book Faire
September 13
georgiaindiebookfaire.com

20th annual Decatur Book Festival
October 3–4
decaturbookfestival.com

Book Festival of the MJCCA
November 2–17
atlantajcc.org/book-festival-of-the-mjcca