

STOCKBRIDGE, EDINBURGH

MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

BOOK ARTIST RACHEL HAZELL TAKES US AROUND THIS CREATIVE COMMUNITY
IN EDINBURGH, STARTING WITH HER OWN HOME AND STUDIO

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As befits a book artist's home, Rachel's living room is decorated with typography and printed work, including a manifesto by Aardvark Letterpress and an alphabet by Bookhou on the wall. Opposite page: Rachel at work, and out in her front garden where a reclaimed timber cabinet houses a 'free library'





“Enter a world of paper, bindings, spools of tape, stationery, maps and shelves lined with interesting volumes”

The clues are there as you approach Rachel Hazell's home in Stockbridge, a leafy suburb of Edinburgh beside the Water of Leith. There's the Little Free Library – a cabinet of books to borrow, housed in a reclaimed-timber cabinet by the front gate. And then there's a large, bright green, waterproof armchair in the front garden – the perfect place to sit quietly and read. If you haven't guessed, books are important in this house. In fact, it's no exaggeration to say they are vital.

Rachel is a book artist, a literary sculptor and a travelling bookbinder. She lives by the motto: 'Read, Make, Love Books'. Climb the stairs to her purple front door and you enter a world of paper, bindings, spools of tape, stationery, maps and shelves lined with interesting volumes. “I love

everything about paper,” she says. “As well as making books, I love sending letters, wrapping up parcels, painting postcards....”

Rachel moved back to Edinburgh where she had studied English Literature at the university, after a sojourn in London doing an MA in Book Art. “I couldn't wait to get back,” she says. “There are few cities from where you can see both the hills and the sea.” She settled in Stockbridge in one of The Colonies – stone maisonettes built in the 1860s by The Edinburgh Co-operative Building Company to house working people and their families.

“The last owner of this house was a stonemason,” Rachel says. “He lived here with his three children.” Nowadays the Colonies house many artists and craftspeople. It's a friendly and supportive community that suits Rachel very well.* »

Left to right: Rachel stripped all the walls back to plaster; one of her books made from driftwood; the mantelpiece with a paper display case of treasures; the print is by Gerhard Richter and the throw by Donna Wilson





"I try not to get too tempted in IJ Mellis cheesemonger's, but it's hard. It specialises in farmhouse cheese, selling many local varieties.

"I come here to stock up on Taleggio, Castel Blue and Manchego before heading off to Iona. It also sells local oatcakes and duck eggs."

mellischeese.net



"Ronde Bicycle Outfitters, above, is within walking distance of my home and has become my second sitting room. It was once a butcher's (the original tiles are still there) but now it's a bike shop with a great café. I meet other artists here for lunch. The soup is by the Union of Genius and is delivered by bike, in a bladder. The cake by Suki Bakes is fabulous (the salted caramel and peanut butter brownie especially) and the coffee is from local artisan roasters."

rondebike.com





"Smith & Gertrude is another regular haunt of mine. They have 'cheese and wine flights' where a selection of different cheeses are matched with wines. Delicious! I love the way it's decorated, too: it feels very clean and Scandinavian."
smithandgertrude.com

Stockbridge in a snapshot

Close to the city centre and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Stockbridge's cluster of streets with their handsome stone properties overlooking the Water of Leith is one of Edinburgh's most covetable areas in which to live.

Its independent shops, cafés and bars are populated by artists and artisans, as well as visitors who stroll pleasurably around, ducking in and out of bookshops and furniture stores.



"I can lose hours in Golden Hare Books, left, and never leave empty-handed. It is filled with unusual and beautifully curated books: some I've already read, others that I haven't come across before. I love the way the books are grouped in themes and presented sparingly on shelves."

goldenharebooks.com »





"Dick's, where I bought the red Tracey Neuls shoes on my bookshelves, left, is more like a gallery than a shop. As well as buying shoes, I go there for clothes and bits and pieces for the home, including stationery and pens. It also sells menswear. The owners, Uli and Andrew, have a great eye, know all the suppliers and everything is carefully chosen and displayed." dicks-edinburgh.co.uk




"Comfortable chairs... provide places to perch and read, and the table is a picture of organised stationery clutter"

As well as her studio in Stockbridge, where she crafts intricate books from materials as diverse as driftwood and nautical charts, Rachel spends her time on the island of Iona in the Hebrides, where her partner John runs the Iona hostel and where she has a studio. A self-confessed islomaniac, she grabs every opportunity to visit an island and, as well as frequent visits to Iona, she runs bookbinding workshops on Shetland, Venice and Nantucket. "The thing about islands," she says paraphrasing George Macleod, founder of the Iona community, "is there's less space between heaven and earth."

Back at base, Rachel plans her work, future workshops and travels surrounded by the things she loves and that inspire her. There is something to fascinate and intrigue everywhere around, from the mantelpiece which is piled artfully with her own books, automata, a manifesto and sundry treasures, to her studio which is heaped with racks

of washi tape, spools of thread and reams of paper. Comfortable chairs sourced from smart local furniture store, Moleta Munro, provide places to perch and read, and the table is a picture of organised stationery clutter – evidence of book art in progress.

When it's time for a break, Rachel has only to take a short stroll to the heart of Stockbridge, to have a coffee with a friend in bike shop-cum-café Ronde, or go for a swim at Glenogle Baths over the road ("So close I could walk there in my pyjamas"). It is a neighbourhood that she loves to return to after her frequent travels.

"Every time I walk down the steps from the baths towards the Colonies, I feel glad I'm home."  For more information on Rachel's book binding courses, including her five-week online course, and to follow her travels, sign up to her mailing list at rachelhazell.com



This page: a pair of Tracey Neuls boots sit by the Nub chair by Patricia Urquiola in the bedroom. Opposite: Rachel strolls beside the Water of Leith

