

Singular approach
The one-title bookshop

On a quiet side street in busy Ginza sits Morioka Shoten, a tiny bookshop empty but for the lone product on sale: a single title that changes every week. Founder Yoshiyuki Morioka used to work at a bookseller in Jimbo-cho [the city's bookshop district] before going it alone in 2006 near Ginza, initially opening a gallery-cum-bookshop that specialised in photography, art and architecture. "When I did book launch events, sales were good," he says. "It occurred to me that I could make a business if I sold just one book." Morioka won investment from Masamichi Toyama, a retail consultant and founder of



similarly focused ventures such as Soup Stock Tokyo and Giraffe, a necktie specialist. To supplement revenue, Morioka invites authors and photographers to deliver talks or sell their wares to accompany the launch of new publications. That hybrid model allowed Morioka Shoten to open in Ginza, specifically geared towards the single-book concept. Each week's book is presented on a table in the front window and on the counter at the back of the shop. "It's been a hit," says Morioka. The shop has won the approval of authors, who enjoy a space that allows them to engage directly with their audience. Fans travel from across Japan and beyond to visit a shop whose success proves the power of a simple idea in a crowded market. — JT



Words on the street
Bookshop chain McNally Jackson is capitalising on Midtown Manhattan's retail renaissance.

"We're never really looking to expand," says Sarah McNally, founder of the McNally Jackson chain of bookshops in New York. "We're never like, 'We want to make our lives hell and make more work.'" So when the company's director, Doug Singleton, floated the idea of a new shop – what would become the chain's fifth – at Rockefeller Center in Midtown Manhattan, McNally was sceptical. "The idea of Rockefeller Center didn't seem very McNally Jackson at first," she says, as she shows MONOCLE around the new timber-swathed outlet. "But when I saw this space, I realised that Doug was right. When I moved to New York in the 1990s, there was a tradition of these beautiful, iconic Midtown bookshops, such as Scribner's, Brentano's and Rizzoli, that have all gone now. The idea of reinstating that kind of business in the area was exciting."

Since McNally Jackson opened its first shop in the downtown Nolita neighbourhood in 2004, it has grown into the most notable chain of independent bookshops in the city. Each branch executes the traditional functions of a boutique New York literary retailer: stocking a diverse range of quality titles, hosting author readings and generally providing a physical locus for a bookish clientele that spends a lot of time in the realms of their imagination. Beyond these core offerings, McNally Jackson's success is built on an unusually dynamic retail strategy. In 2013 it opened Goods for the Study, a sister operation specialising in stationery. Last year, McNally Editions, the chain's publishing arm, released its first collection: a series of paperback editions of neglected and out-of-print works.

The chain's vast new 650 sq m space at Rockefeller Center forms part of a broader Midtown renaissance. A couple of years ago, there was genuine concern that the appeal of



BEST:
Location spotting



PHOTOGRAPHER: *Franziska Hoffmann, Bill Grande*

MONOCLE
Retail Survey 2023

1. The shopfront at Rockefeller Center
2. Founder Sarah McNally
3. McNally Jackson's Midtown shop
4. Browsing for books
5. Selections from the retailer's publishing arm
6. Packed shelves



the world's largest central business district might have been permanently diminished. Over several centuries Midtown had evolved to meet the demands of millions of office workers commuting to and from the area, five days a week, but at the height of the pandemic almost all of those commuters were staying at home instead. Hundreds of small-to-medium sized businesses that depended on the daily influx of commuters were forced to close.

Some of the pandemic's challenges might still persist in the US but businesses and workers are at least returning to this area. The shake-up of Midtown's real-estate market has prompted some creative solutions including a call from New York's mayor, Eric Adams, to convert vacant office spaces into housing. There has also been an upswing in the area's street-level retail offering with Rockefeller Center serving as an unlikely focal point; this

"All of our downtown restaurant neighbours started moving to Rockefeller Center, so it just started feeling nice up here"

imposing complex of 19 commercial buildings, designed in the art deco and international styles, has mainly housed corporate offices since its construction in the 1930s.

Property investment company Tishman Speyer, the Rockefeller Center's owners since 2000, has sought to diversify and improve its once-stodgy retail offerings. In 2021 the London-based music retailer Rough Trade raised eyebrows when it moved its New York outlet from young, hip Williamsburg to Rockefeller Center. Several other comparably fashionable retailers and restaurants followed. "Rockefeller Center now isn't what it was five or 10 years ago," says McNally. "Rough Trade was the first one to make the move here from Williamsburg, where it was near one of our other stores. Then all of our downtown restaurant neighbours started moving to Rockefeller Center, so it just started feeling nice up here."

While McNally teases further projects on the horizon, she's resolute that, whatever the future holds for McNally Jackson, the chain will stay in the city. "We'd never leave New York," she says. "There's an alchemy between the city that we love and the books that we love." — HRS

McNally Jackson shoppers
Rockefeller Center

Fabio, 49, New Jersey
"I'm generally looking at self-development or self-improvement books and biographies. I hear *Dopamine Nation* by Anna Lembke is an amazing book about how, with social media, we can't turn off our minds. They do a good job here of mixing it up every so often for browsing."

Julia, 29, East Harlem
"To tell you the truth, I'm a bit of a pen freak. McNally Jackson has some of the nice Japanese precision-point pens, although they're not as cutting-edge as I prefer. My favourite pen is a Montblanc Artinliner with a 0.3mm tip but Pilot has some really nice multi-pens."

Philip, 69, Atlanta
"I'm getting my husband a birthday gift. He likes old pictures of New York. I'm thinking of this big heavy book, *New York: An Illustrated History* by Ric Burns, James Sanders and Lisa Ades."

