

Book Club

Reviews and recommendations from critic Ron Charles.

Pages, from McLean & Eakin Booksellers in Petoskey, Mich., is the bookstore-scented candle you've been craving.



“Every time I open a book, I think of your store, and I just want that smell.” Jessilynn and Matt Norcross, who own McLean & Eakin Booksellers in Petoskey, Mich., heard that over and over again from their loyal customers during the pandemic.

Even when McLean & Eakin finally reopened its doors for limited shopping, customers still craved the olfactory pleasure of the books. “We literally had to tell some people to leave their masks on,” Jessilynn tells me, “not because they were trying to disobey the rules, but because they wanted to smell the store”

Then a light went on — literally. The Norcrosses asked Lindsey June, a local candle maker with a background in biochemistry, to make a candle that smells like McLean & Eakin. “Every week I would take home all of these samples and put them all around the house,” Jessilynn says. “I would wander from room to room sniffing, thinking, ‘Does this remind me of the store?’” That process took several months, but they finally got it just right. The result is Pages, a hand-poured, natural soy candle by June Apothecary. The first batch immediately sold out, but more supply is coming soon, along with book-scented room and linen sprays and diffusers (details).

“Being a small business, you get to do lots of little experiments,” Jessilynn says. “We can adjust to the market in different ways that I think great big companies don't have the ability to.” That innovative spirit is crucial, but how, I ask, did McLean & Eakin manage to survive a year-long lockdown while competing with Some Other Online Bookseller?

“We're just a whole lot nicer,” Jessilynn says. (I take no official position on that claim.) “People instantly and inherently understood that if they didn't shop with us, we were not going to be here. We didn't even have to say it. It was crystal clear to people. The outpouring of support would daily bring us almost to tears. I mean, the notes we got, the things people were saying. . . . People would bring us food. A box of oranges would arrive from Florida. Somebody brought us donuts one day, bagels, flowers. It was just . . . it was wonderful.”