



2020

*first
first*

A YEAR IN THE LIFE
OF A BOOKSHOP

One of the great joys (in a long punchlist of delights) as we opened First Light three years ago was building our first order of over 10,000 books. It was astonishing. Which titles to choose. Which editions of classic works. The authors to double and triple up on. It was a bookseller's dream, and the assignment led us to a core ideal of our shop: Poetry would live in roughly the center of First Light. We would double its allotted shelf space, too, all 750 volumes, some slender collections, some hefty tomes, to greet guests with its white-oak arms spread wide.

We put poetry in a prominent place not because those books would be big sellers, but rather as something like a sunny horizon line, a foretelling, of what First Light might be for our neighborhood.

As a team, we think a lot about neighborhoods. Certainly about these shady blocks of Hyde Park (more than a quarter of our members live within HP), but also we're curious about how a neighborhood moves and flexes. What it looks like for a neighborhood to be flourishing and good. Neighborhoods are little ecosystems of human life. They are messy and lovely, seeming to be in constant change mode, yet also carved with foundational strata layers of personality.

Our world exists in a newfound attention economy, where much of culture is hyperfocused on efficiency. A max squeeze of productivity. For technology to not only smooth out the wrinkles in our day-to-day, but to supercharge things in ways we couldn't have imagined a decade ago. To wipe away any friction, to skip over any learning curves, to avoid inconveniences and even surprise.

We see First Light as a counter to that. We don't think of life as data. We believe life is poetry. It wasn't a business plan or a brand strategy that made this corner of Hyde Park the beating heart that it's become these last three years. It was the wonderful mystery of thousands of people making it a place they cared about.

For that, we could never thank you enough.

—TAYLOR, ROBIN, BREEZY AND THE FIRST LIGHT TEAM



FAVORITE MEMORIES

"Every morning, I walk to FL with my husband and daughter, Frida, on our way to drop her off at daycare. We sit at a table in the courtyard and feed Frida breakfast. She loves looking at all the dogs, waving at the planes overhead, pointing with delight at the rabbit painted on the front door, and waving at the buses going by (who now anticipate her and honk their horns). It is the best part of my day and reminds me how special my little family is and how FL is our second home."

"After over a decade in Austin, we moved to Switzerland at the end of 2025, and First Light was one of the last places I said goodbye to on our farewell tour. It was nothing grand, just a coffee on the patio on a chilly December day at dusk. My sense of place is intimately tied up in First Light, and when I miss Austin, it tends to be the center of gravity of that feeling."

"Getting great, thoughtful help from a staff member about books for a retiring UT prof.."

"I got my membership as a birthday gift and was thrilled to go in, buy some books, get my tote, and enjoy a glass of wine and ham and cheese baguette. It was a perfect day"

"It's hard to pick just one, but a standout memory for my wife and I was how warm & cozy it felt to sit inside First Light after making the frigid, treacherously icy walk from our home to the shop during the ice storm in January of this year."

"Special ordering Harrow the Ninth and getting to gab with the bookseller about our Book Four theories for like five minutes! Bonus one is bringing roses to the barista team for St. George's Day"

"First Light is everything you've ever wanted in a bookstore and just happens to be the perfect neighborhood spot where you can go any day, any time, and folks will treat you like an old friend."

"The shop is so friendly and warm — like getting a hug from a good friend."

"Closest to the kind of bookstore I'd open of any place in Austin."

"My favorite spot in town comprised of equal parts local intelligentsia, students, tired parents, and artists."

"Trying extremely hard to be cool, but actually delivers."

"The one space I leave my home to feel at home in."

"It's more than a third space: it's a second home."

HOW MEMBERS DESCRIBE FIRST LIGHT TO A FRIEND

LAST YEAR

AUG

Dreamy evening to celebrate Emily Hunt Kivel's debut novel, **DWELLING**.

Our **SUMMER SHORTS** book club proved that reading quietly together can spark great conversation.



SEP



Our second annual Birthday Block Party. Author readings, a brass band parade, and over **1,000 LOCALS GATHER**.



ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER gets people reading Pynchon's least popular novel.

JAN

New season of **BOOK CLUBS**. Small & Indie and World Wide What returned for year two.

GOOD DAY AUSTIN stops by for a tour of the shop, giving Central Texas a glimpse into life at First Light.

Our **MOON LISTS** journal collaboration, "Prompts for Deep Reading" debuts.

Team **HOLIDAY PARTY** with glamour portrait sessions in the kid's section.

OCT

Chess Master and memoirist **DANNY RENSCH** duels a breezeway full of challengers simultaneously.

"BOO SHOP" returns for Halloween at First Light.

Partner with **BLUEBIRD BEHAVIORAL** to welcome a group of adults with autism into the weekly work rhythm of the shop. Wednesdays get brighter because of them.



Eddie joins our inventory team during the busiest season. He's been our **STAR UN-BOXER** ever since.

Holiday in full swing with our treelighting, **COURTYARD MOVIES**, and a visit from Santa.

Our first annual **ZEITGEIST SURVEY**, taking a look back at the books that shaped our community's year.

DEC



The great **LYLE LOVETT** visits the shop for Ballroom Marfa event.

Completed first school **BOOK FAIRS** in Austin. Big lift and big fun.



NOV

Launch of **A TREMENDOUS THING**, our very own children's guide to reading



APR

YESTERYEAR author Caro Claire Burke at a packed Baker Center. By the end of the month it was a #1 New York Times bestseller.



Legendary artist **TOM SACHS** comes to the shop for his book signing and leads a group of 30 on a neighborhood jog.

Kristina, our **COMMUNITY & EVENTS MANAGER**, joins the First Light team.

TEXAS BOOK TRAIL, one of the biggest days of the bookshop year.

Mac Barnett and Shawn Harris took us to **THE FUTURE BOOK**, in partnership with the Texas Book Festival.

SAM HOSTS TRIVIA at the Central Library—a big deal!

Huckberry presents memoirist Tom Junod, **IN THE DAYS OF MY YOUTH I WAS TOLD WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN**

MAY

Anna Konkle's event for **SANE ONE**. Fellow comedians and her partner gave a live reading from the book.



JUN

Received Austin Chronicle Critics pick for **MOST BOOKISH BEATING HEART OF A NEIGHBORHOOD**.
Aw Shucks.

First ever FL **SPELLING BEE!** Molly Martin wins a thrilling tournament. The winning word: 'eudaemonia', meaning happiness, well-being or human flourishing,



NO SCREENS on weekends kicks off. A joyous shift unfolds inside the shop.

Sam & Ashley headed to **ILLINOIS FOR CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE** and came back brimming with ideas for the kids' section.

JUL

GEORGE SAUNDERS! More than 500 people at the LBJ Auditorium.

AUSTIN MARATHON speeds by our cardboard sign makers and a house-made Gatorade station.

Host our **WINTER SALON**, gathering Patron members and 50+ local authors together. Readings from Casey Gerald, Carrie Moore, and Stephen Harrigan.



FEB



THE ATLANTIC cover feature about the end of reading. We disagree.

The **WORLD CUP** stirs a renewed interest in international fiction in the shop.

FIRST SUNDAYS all summer with afternoon jazz and bluegrass in the courtyard.

MEMBER SURVEY + STATS

208 MEMBERS TOOK THIS YEAR'S SURVEY.
A FEW HEADLINE NUMBERS AND NOTABLE FIGURES.

	OUT OF 5
First Light team experience	4.92
Cafe team experience	4.86
Cleanliness/order	4.94
Coffee program rating	4.63
Beer & wine program rating	4.63
Cafe food & snack menu rating	4.17
Likelihood to renew membership	4.76

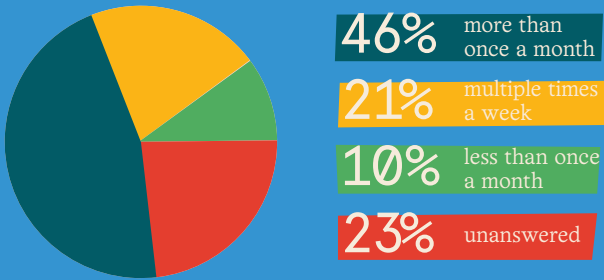
NET
PROMOTER
SCORE
79.8

Up from 71
last year,
HBR calls
anything above
70 "world-class".

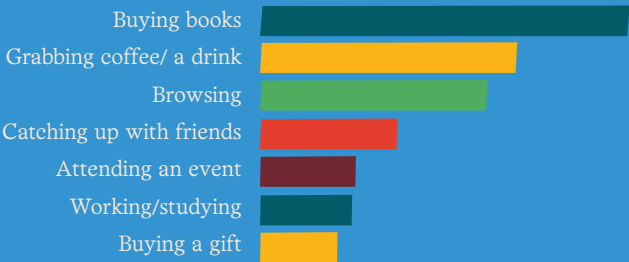
97 EVENTS	68 IN STORE	7,935 ATTENDEES
	29 OFFSITE	5,193 BOOKS SOLD AT EVENTS
BUSIEST MONTH: October with 15, May close behind at 14		
LARGEST PARTNERED AUTHOR EVENT: George Saunders at LBJ, 810 attendees and 843 copies sold		
FAVORITE GENRE: Lit Fic (19), followed by Memoir (10) and Cookbooks (8)		

Total books received	144,601
Espresso shots	132,862
Drip coffees	17,912
Lattes	30,393
New members	802
Author event attendees	2,963
Staff recommendations written	187
Stickers given away	4000
Bookmarks printed	21,000
Milk gallons used	3,830
Hot dogs sold	1008

How often members visit



What brings members in the most(top picks)



Biggest motivator for joining membership



50% attended an author event

24% live in Hyde Park

58% placed a special book order

92% gave full 5-star rating to their overall shop experience

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED



SAM, on a year in
BOOKSELLING

"It's been a year of huge hits. A shelf's-worth duked it out for cultural dominance: *Yesteryear*, *Strangers*, *Theo of Golden*, *Heart the Lover*, *Sunburn*, *Famesick*, *Vigil*, and *The Correspondent*. Readers averse to the mainstream got ambitious, braving *Infinite Jest* and William Gass' *The Tunnel*. And a wave of genre fiction from Asia, including Asako Yuzuki's *Hooked* and Uketsu's "Strange" series, kept everyone abuzz. A Booker shortlisting lifted Vincenzo Latronico's *Perfection*, and we saw a bout of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Odyssey* mania. The book world is more exciting than ever. I can't wait to see what our fourth year brings."



KRISTINA, on a year of
AUTHOR EVENTS

"Austin is a city full of talented writers. As Events Manager at First Light, I've come to know many Austin authors as friends. As a point of pride, over 1,400 people attended our 24+ events for local authors. And I've learned that Austin writers and their people show up for one other time and time again. Now every time we announce a book event with local roots, I plan for a sold-out evening, knowing that the community of literature here will show up for one another. That kinship is what it's all about."

"Real community grows through seemingly ordinary moments. It's a slow transformation, and one of the greatest privileges of my work here is getting to be a part of it. Simple conversations can lead to something much deeper. During a recent Summer Shorts evening, as we read a Sigrid Nunez story together, several of us realized that we'd all grown up in first-generation immigrant households. That conversation gave us a language for experiences we hadn't realized that we shared. Moments like this remind me of what we're continuing to build here at First Light. The experience of knowing and being known."

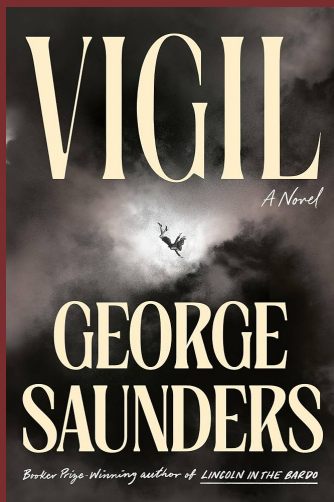


RACHEL, on our wonderful
COMMUNITY

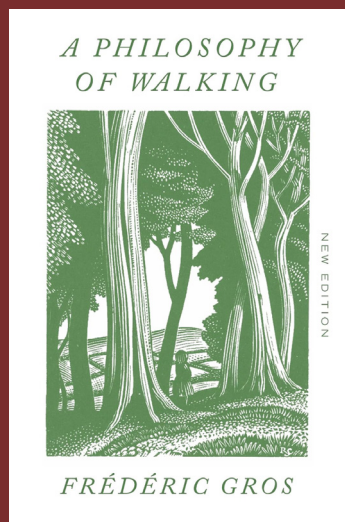


BEN, on our
CAFE TEAM

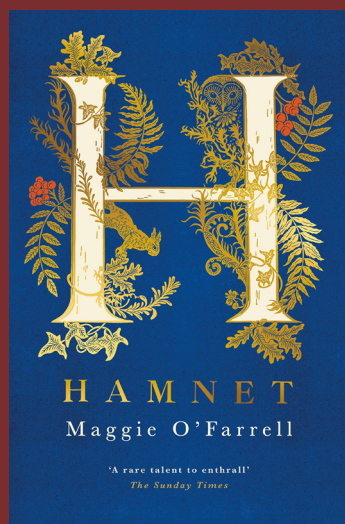
"It's been a whirlwind year in the cafe. Proof is in the latte count: 30,393 to be exact. Our shop stays full. And the cafe and its team evolved and grew each day this year. If you're a regular at the coffee window, you've met a lot of new faces. It's a privilege to grow a team, but also bittersweet saying goodbye to teammates who are dear friends. Watching each member of our team discover what makes First Light special has been one of the most rewarding parts of the year. Change is rarely easy, but through it all, our team continued to embody the best of this shop."



Top Fiction 2025



Top Non-Fiction 2025



Top Backlist pre-2020

FICTION

Overall

- 1 **VIGIL**
George Saunders
- 2 **YESTERYEAR**
Caro Claire Burke
- 3 **I WHO HAVE NEVER KNOWN MEN**
Jacqueline Harpman
- 4 **THE CORRESPONDENT**
Virginia Evans
- 5 **HEART THE LOVER**
Lily King
- 6 **THEO OF GOLDEN**
Allen Levi
- 7 **PROJECT HAIL MARY**
Andy Weir
- 8 **MARTYR!**
Kaveh Akbar
- 9 **GRAPE JUICE**
Eliza Dumais
- 10 **STRANGE HOUSES**
Uketsu

NON-FICTION

Overall

- 1 **A PHILOSOPHY OF WALKING**
Frédéric Gros
- 2 **STRANGERS**
Belle Burden
- 3 **MEDITATIONS FOR MORTALS**
Oliver Burkeman
- 4 **THE SANE ONE**
Anna Konkle
- 5 **FAMESICK**
Lena Dunham
- 6 **THE CREATIVE ACT**
Rick Rubin
- 7 **A YEAR OF JUNK JOURNALING**
Martina Calvi
- 8 **BREAD OF ANGELS**
Patti Smith
- 9 **DOG SHOW**
Billy Collins
- 10 **EVERYTHING IS TUBERCULOSIS**
John Green

DEEP BACKLIST

More than five years old

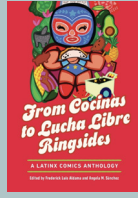
- 1 **HAMNET**
Maggie O'Farrell
- 2 **LONESOME DOVE**
Larry McMurtry
- 3 **WUTHERING HEIGHTS**
Emily Brontë
- 4 **RED RISING**
Pierce Brown
- 5 **STONER**
John Williams
- 6 **THE SECRET HISTORY**
Donna Tartt
- 7 **DOG SONGS**
Mary Oliver
- 8 **THE MEMORY POLICE**
Yoko Ogawa
- 9 **THE ARTIST'S WAY**
Julia Cameron
- 10 **EAST OF EDEN**
John Steinbeck
- 11 **BUNNY**
Mona Awad
- 12 **THE BEAUTY OF EVERYDAY OBJECTS**
Soetsu Yanagi
- 13 **THE ODYSSEY**
Homer (Emily Wilson translation)
- 14 **WRITERS & LOVERS**
Lily King
- 15 **TRAIN DREAMS**
Denis Johnson
- 16 **DRIVE YOUR PLOW OVER THE BONES OF THE DEAD**
Olga Tokarczuk
- 17 **WOMEN WITHOUT MEN**
Shahrnush Parsipur
- 18 **MY BRILLIANT FRIEND**
Elena Ferrante
- 19 **DEVOTIONS**
Mary Oliver
- 20 **NORMAL PEOPLE**
Sally Rooney

BESTSELLERS

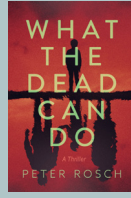
LOCAL AUTHOR EVENT SPOTLIGHT



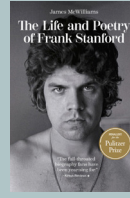
AUG 5, 2025
DWELLING
Emily Hunt Kivel



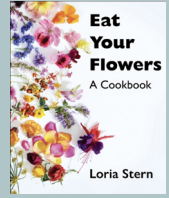
AUG 17, 2025
FROM COCINAS TO LUCHA LIBRE RINGSIDES
Frederick Aldama et al



AUG 26, 2025
WHAT THE DEAD CAN DO
Peter Rosch



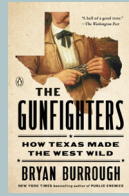
SEP 3, 2025
THE LIFE AND POETRY OF FRANK STANFORD
James McWilliams



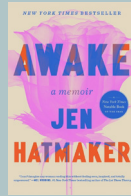
SEP 11, 2025
EAT YOUR FLOWERS
Loria Stern



SEP 16, 2025
THE CHILDREN'S MELODY
Eli Durst



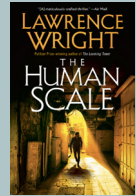
OCT 29, 2025
THE GUNFIGHTERS
Bryan Burrough



NOV 6, 2025
AWAKE
Jen Hatmaker



NOV 7, 2025
BALLROOM MARFA
Lawrence Wright



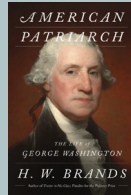
NOV 20, 2025
THE HUMAN SCALE
Lawrence Wright



JAN 21, 2026
AN ANCHOR IN THE SEA OF TIME
Stephen Harrigan



MAR 25, 2026
ENCOUNTERS WITH UNEXPECTED ANIMALS
Bret Anthony Johnston



MAY 12, 2026
AMERICAN PATRIARCH
H.W. Brands



MAY 14, 2026
OFFSEASON
Avigayl Sharp



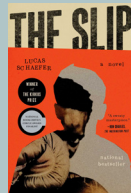
MAY 28, 2026
BENEATH THE BLUEBONNETS
Carmen Gray



JUN 9, 2026
EARTH 7
Deb Olin Unferth



JUN 10, 2026
MONSTER OF A LAND
Lauren Hough



JUN 23, 2026
THE SLIP
Lucas Schaefer



JUN 28, 2026
ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES
Amanda Eyre Ward



JUL 7, 2026
LAST NIGHT WAS KILLER
Mary Pauline Lowry



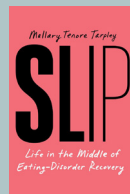
JUL 15, 2026
ONE STATE UNDER GOD
Joseph L. Locke



JUL 21, 2026
MUDLARK
Mary Helen Specht



AUG 5, 2026
THE BEAUTY OF DAYS GONE BY
Jason Stone



AUG 11, 2026
SLIP
Mallery Tenore Tarpley

BOOKSHOPS WE ADMIRE



STORE
**WILLIAM STOUT
ARCHITECTURAL BOOKS**

LOCATION
**JACKSON SQUARE,
SAN FRANCISCO**

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT IT
One of only three US bookstores dedicated entirely to architecture and design, 70,000 titles deep.



STORE
BALDWIN & CO.

LOCATION
MARIGNY, NEW ORLEANS

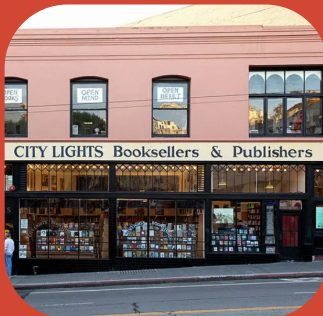
WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT IT
A Black-owned bookstore and coffee shop named for James Baldwin. Its foundation has given away six figures in books and goods.



STORE
DAUNT BOOKS

LOCATION
MARYLEBONE, LONDON

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT IT
The first custom-built bookshop in the world (1910), with its books shelved by country



STORE
**CITY LIGHTS
BOOKSELLERS**

LOCATION
**NORTH BEACH,
SAN FRANCISCO**

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT IT
It's widely known as the birthplace of Beat literature and publisher of Ginsberg's "Howl", but City Lights' longtime (50 years!) head buyer Paul Yamazaki is something of a celebrity in bookselling circles. Paul's book *Reading The Room* is a love letter to the work of bookselling.



STORE
PILLOW-CAT BOOKS

LOCATION
EAST VILLAGE, NEW YORK

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT IT
NYC's first animal-themed bookstore. Every single book features an animal or animal character somewhere in it. Owned and operated by Cleo Le-Tan, daughter of famed New Yorker illustrator Pierre Le-Tan.



STORE
RODGERS BOOK BARN

LOCATION
HILLSDALE, NEW YORK

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT IT
50,000+ used and unusual books stacked inside an actual barn on five acres. Founder Maureen Rodgers "turned out the hay and put in books."

(WENDELL)

"A PATH IS LITTLE MORE THAN A HABIT THAT
COMES WITH KNOWLEDGE OF
A PLACE."
A MILLARY RITUAL OF LOSS

(BERRY)

(FROM)

(A NATIVE HILL)