

Antique shops of New York

New York City, ever since it was called New Amsterdam in 1624, has the onus of being one of the most recent cities in the world. New York is consistently recent, modern; indeed, contemporary.

Perini Journal

New York has been contemporary for the past four hundred years, creating culture, sustaining and diffusing it. If it is not the only world capital – because other cities, too, contend for a right to this primacy – it is surely one of the ten most important cities in a list that also includes Carthage.

But a city cannot exist without its inhabitants. We say New York but we mean the millions of people who have created and populated it, diffused it, built it, respected it, made it important and loved it. The heart and soul of a city is comprised by the sum of the hearts and souls of its inhabitants, and its character is given by the sum of the actions of each individual citizen, each individual family, each individual father and each individual son. Day after day. Year after year.

IT IS BEARING THIS SPIRIT IN MIND THAT WE VISITED THE J. LEVINE CO. BOOKSTORE, to see first-hand the fourth generation of a family pursuing the same activity as their forefathers, while the fifth generation (Shawn is already working there) is preparing to continue this cultural tradition. Over 100 years - the bookstore was started up in 1905 - of activity. In the same place, in the same city. And that city is New York, famous for being one of those places where, notoriously, commercial activities remain in the same hands for only a short time and where, as an adult, being able to recognize the building one grew up in as a child can be considered a feat to be proud of. J. Levine Co. is the oldest bookstore in New York and one of the absolute oldest commercial activities. It has grown step by step together with the importance of the city itself, and still today the bookstore managed by Danny Levine is one of the best-stocked Judaica bookstores in the world, thanks to the fact that from the multi-ethnic city of New York, it has been able to pick and choose, collect and preserve text from every part of the world. We can see that just by visiting it: the fertile chaos caused by the quantity of books that well exceeds the available shelf space, immediately informs the faithful, the scholarly or the traveler that whatever he or she is looking for, this is the place to find it, assisted of course by a smiling staff beaming with the kindness typical of yesteryear.

WE ALL KNOW THAT NEW YORK IS SYNONYMOUS OF CULTURE, but we like to give a name and surname to every place that, like the antiquarian bookstore Argosy, have helped New York attain the cultural importance that makes it so fascinating. Antique books, first editions, rare prints, autographed letters, maps: six floors in New York's midtown and a large warehouse in Brooklyn. Since 1926, and for three generations, the Argosy Book Store collects, chooses and distributes culture in all intelligent forms of ink on paper, for the fascination of scholars, visitors and writers coming from all over the world. It was to its founder, Louis Cohen, that in 1960 Jacqueline Kennedy asked for help in setting up a collection of popular American culture and folklore at the White House. And it is on his heirs that scholars and bibliographers continue to rightly place their trust when it comes to searching for rare and precious texts.

OURS IS PURE LOVE OF TECHNOLOGY, WITH NO CONFINES OR PREJUDICES. Love for technology that goes beyond the limits of time, and even farther when it is placed at the service of culture and beauty. For this reason, we must also highlight - as a necessary step in order to understand all the reasons why New York is New York - Dempsey & Carroll, engravers and typographers of stationery since 1878. Dempsey started a production technology (that has certainly been refined in the course of the last 200 years) and brought it to its top expression. He decided that, in order to create the best stationery - the one used by the most cultured and exigent Americans - all he had to do was use this marvelous technique on the best cotton papers. Today, Jonathan Key Arnold, general manager, guarantees us that the only thing that has changed since then is that the papers are no longer bought on the market but rather are specially produced, bearing trace of this fine watermark. The ambience of good taste and light-heartedness that one breathes on Lexington Avenue, between 74th and 75th streets, is enough to make us want to write a message by hand again to those we love. •