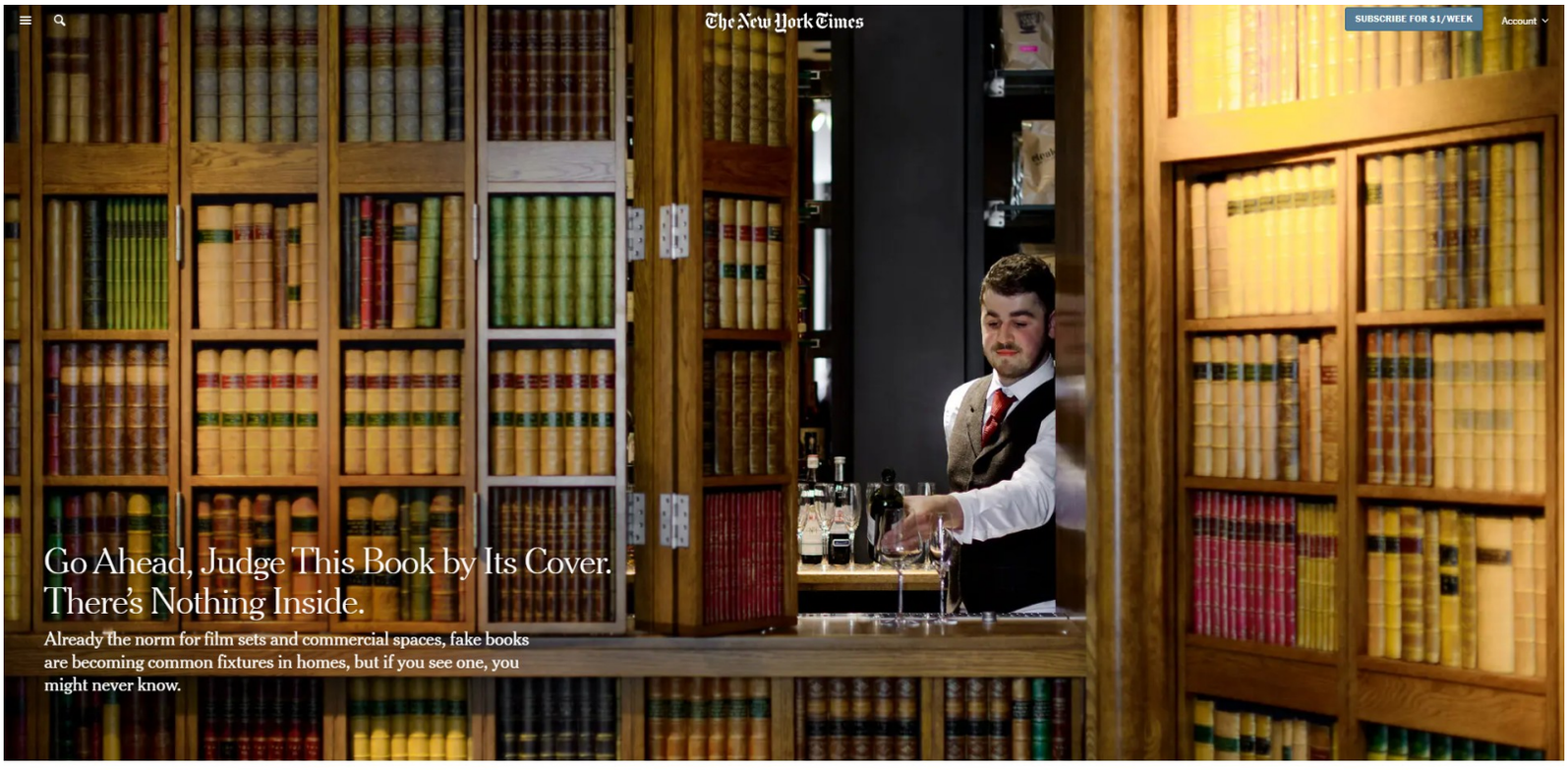

Go Ahead, Judge This Book by Its Cover. There's Nothing Inside.

Already the norm for film sets and commercial spaces, fake books are becoming common fixtures in homes, but if you see one, you might never know.

While some people are going all in and covering entire walls in fake books, others are aghast at the thought that someone would think to decorate with a book that isn't real. DecBOOKS

Give this article

By Anna Kodé
Anna Kodé writes about national housing and design trends for the Real Estate section.

April 28, 2023 6 MIN READ

If it looks like a book, feels like a book and stacks like a book, then there's still a good chance it may not be a book.

Fake books come in several different forms: once-real books that are hollowed out, fabric backdrops with images of books printed onto them, empty boxlike objects with faux titles and authors or sometimes just a facade of spines along a bookshelf. Already the norm for film sets and commercial spaces, fake books are becoming popular fixtures in homes. While some people are going all in and covering entire walls in fake books, others are aghast at the thought that someone would think to decorate with a book that isn't real.

"I will never use fake books," said Jeanie Engelbach, an interior designer and organizer in New York City. "It just registers as pretentious, and it creates the illusion that you are either better read or smarter than you really are."

Ms. Engelbach said she has frequently used books as décor, at times styling clients' bookcases with aesthetics taking priority over function, which is a typical interior-design practice.

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At Books by the Foot — a company that sells, as its name suggests, books by the foot — one can purchase books by color (options include "luscious creams," "vintage cabernet" and "rainbow ombre"), by subject ("well-read art" or "gardening"), wrapped books (covered in linen or rose gold) and more. The tomes are all "rescue books," ones that would otherwise be discarded or recycled for paper pulp, said Charles Roberts, the president of Books by the Foot's parent company, Wonder Book.

During the pandemic lockdown in 2020, remote work created increased demand for the company's services. "People were requesting books for Zoom meetings," Mr. Roberts said. "They wanted classic literature, cookbooks or other things for their backgrounds, kind of like props but also to reflect their personality and tastes. People wanted to avoid getting made fun of for having a romance novel in their background."

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While it mostly specializes in the sale of real books, the company has also dabbled in the world of faux ones. The book seller has cut books — so only the spines remain — and glued them to shelves for cruise ships, "where they don't want to have a lot of weight or worry that the books will fall off the shelves if the weather gets bad," Mr. Roberts said.

There are other, sometimes counterintuitive, uses for fake tomes as well. Although it has the capacity to hold more than 1.35 million of them, many of the books in China's 360,000-square-foot Tianjin Binhai Library aren't real. Instead, perforated aluminum plates emblazoned with images of books can be found, primarily on the upper shelves of the atrium. While the presence of artificial books in a place devoted to reading has been widely criticized — "more fiction than books," one headline mocked — it remains a buzzy tourist attraction. After all, the books don't need to be real if it's just for the 'gram.

Tina Ramchandani, an interior designer in New York, said that her firm has used fake books in both commercial and residential settings. For a dressing room in a members-only club in New Jersey, "where nobody was really going to read the books, but where there were bookshelves, we got all fake books," Ms. Ramchandani said.

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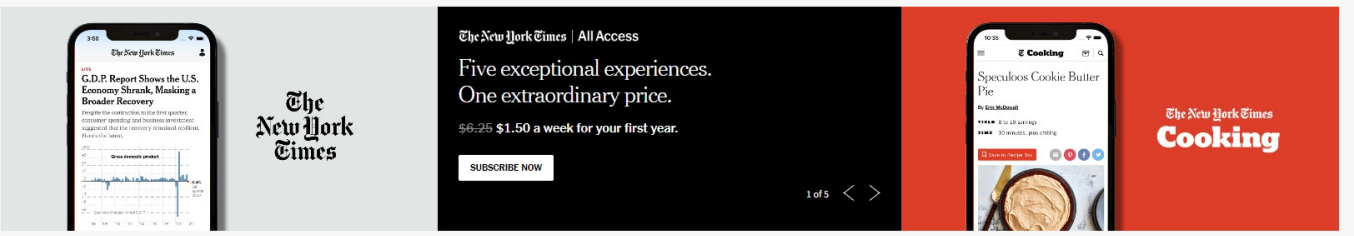
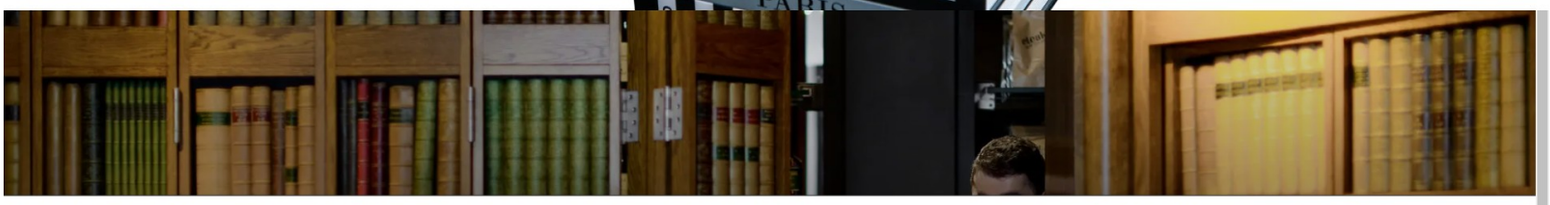


For her clients' homes, fake books are usually placed on the upper shelves of bookcases that can't easily be reached. "We did this for a house out in the Hamptons. It's usually for larger homes, where you're not using every part of the home like you would in the city," Ms. Ramchandani said. "Say you have an extra reading room, library or some sort of media room where you fill it with books and can't ever get to the top parts. So instead of doing real books that are going to collect dust that you're never going to access, we end up doing fake books."

Anna Shiwlall, the owner of 27 Diamonds Interior Design in Anaheim, Calif., said that she frequently makes use of fake books for her clients. Beth Coller for The New York Times

Fake books can also double as storage containers. Beth Coller for The New York Times



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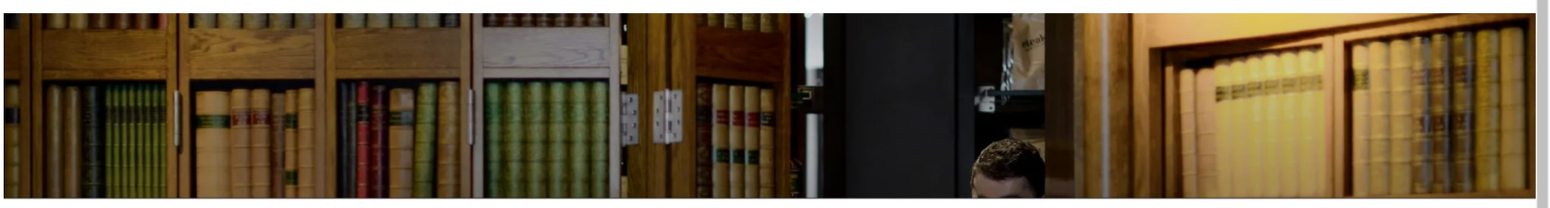

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The Federal Reserve is set to release its report examining what went wrong with its oversight of Silicon Valley Bank.
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Inflation Cooled in March, but Stubborn Price Increases Remain

The Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge, the Personal Consumption Expenditures index, slowed in March. But signs point to staying power.

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Colorful Stories for Children, With the Darkest History as Backdrop

Children's books signed El Pintor were a success in the Netherlands during World War II. Behind the pseudonym was a Jewish couple helping the resistance.
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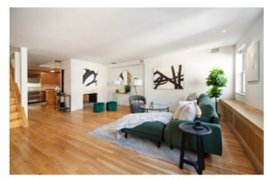

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BIG TICKET

New Condos and Old Townhouses Lead the Pack in February Sales

The priciest sale, at $33.8 million, was for a condo at 220 Central Park South, and a converted former firehouse sold for $25.5 million on East 90th Street.

March 23, 2023 · By VIVIAN MARINO

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A Designer's Home on Central Park, Where the Views Dictate the Décor

Adrienne Vittadini is known for her use of bold colors, often several at once. But not in her Fifth Avenue apartment, which is listed at $7.5 million.

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Wine, Wine and More Wine: The Latest Amenity for Luxury Condo Owners

Over the past couple of years, residential developers have increased their wine programs, hiring specialists, hosting private tastings and even providing ritzy storing options to house one's elaborate collection.

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Big Discounts on Top Listings Push a Trend Into the New Year

Stephen M. Ross, the real estate developer and principal owner of the Miami Dolphins, sold his penthouse atop 25 Columbus Circle for $40 million, down from the $75 million list price in 2019.

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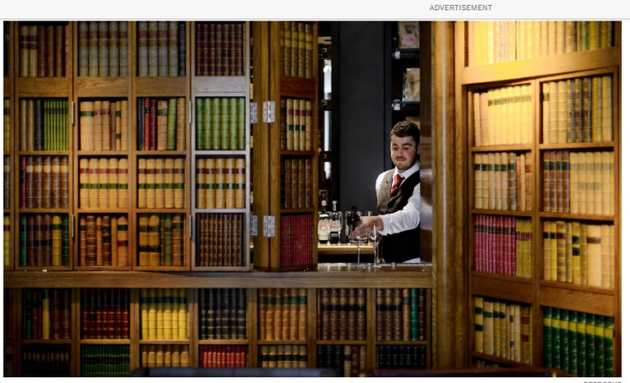

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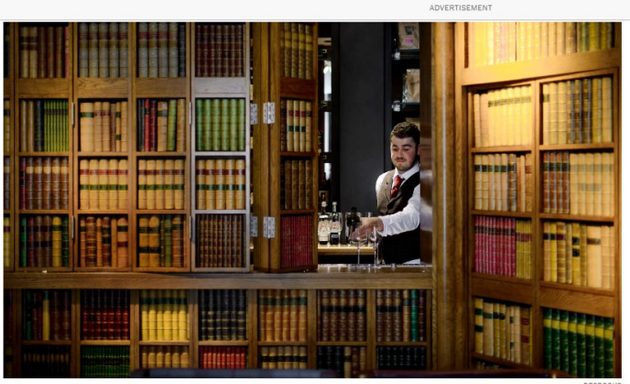

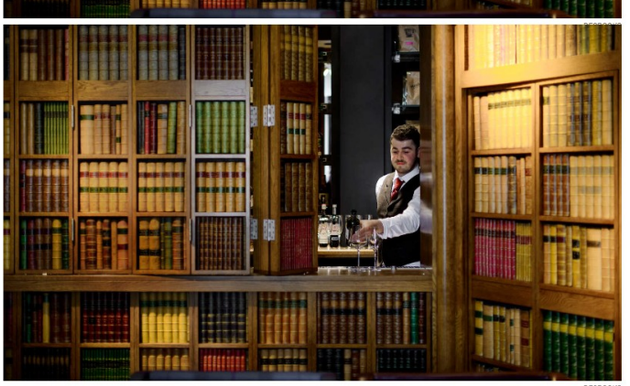

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