



Barefoot Near the Park Oct 9, 2008

Last Thursday, October 2, Barefoot Books, the children's book publisher born in the U.K., with offices in Cambridge, Mass., hosted a packed gala opening in its own 1,000-sq.-ft. corner of FAO Schwarz on Fifth Avenue, near New York City's Central Park.

With its floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking 59th Street, the Barefoot Books boutique in the world's most famous toy store is a far cry from the small booth in a faraway aisle of the children's-only section where founders Nancy Traversy and Tessa Strickland made their first U.S. appearance at what was then ABA. Even then, however, they draped the tables in jewel-colored batik fabrics and lined up books alongside puzzles and gift cards that featured their illustrators' work.

The happy marriage between Barefoot and FAO Schwarz began with a courtship at the gift show in Manhattan. A table likely quite similar to that ABA debut caught the attention of David Niggli, president and chief merchandising officer of FAO Schwarz. Niggli said that Traversy convinced him to make a visit to Cambridge to see the Barefoot store there and to get a sense of how they bring their philosophy to life. "I loved it," Niggli said at Thursday's celebration. "We had a discussion about Barefoot's values and message. FAO was the first children's bookstore in New York, but [the bookstore] had been pushed downstairs, and it lacked cohesion. Now we're bringing the bookstore element back to FAO to the forefront."



If you've read the publisher's titles one at a time, it's hard to describe the cumulative effect of seeing them all together in one space, how beautifully coordinated their palettes, how unified within the boutique's overall design. Yes, Clare Beaton, Debbie Harter, Christopher Carr and Niamh Sharkey (to name but a few of Barefoot's stable of artists) all have distinctive styles. But set face out (oh, the luxury of it!) against backdrops of peat green, cantaloupe orange and watermelon pink, they all cohere. Traversy designed the space with Edie Twining, and every inch makes sense. The northwest corner of the boutique is set off as a performance arena, where children are encouraged to interact three times a day at storytelling hour (11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.), and this past Saturday as part of the gala opening, hourly storytelling and even a yoga class took place--based on *Yoga Pretzels* and *Yoga Planet*, each pose featured on a durable oversize playing card housed in a sturdy corrugated case. Nothing could coax out a wallet more effectively than watching a bunch of 3- to 5-year-olds doing "downward dog" or emerging from a tuck into a "lion's breath" pose with a full-throttle "roar!"

Traversy and Strickland, who took a risk in their decision not to work with chain bookstores because the returns were killing their business, have now seen it pay off in spades. They bet on independent bookstores along with an innovative network of what they call "Stallholders," who sell books at fundraisers and book fairs much like the Avon ladies and Fuller Brush men of old. Traversy says, "Today Stallholding accounts for 20% of Barefoot's business globally and is the fastest growing channel of the business." This summer Barefoot Books also launched its

first title for older readers, *Little Leap Forward* (*Shelf Awareness*, July 16, 2008), an illustrated novel inspired by author Gao Yue's childhood during China's Cultural Revolution. The publisher is definitely in expansion mode. Traversy says that they've had to go back to press on "too many titles to name," but especially gift items and board books since the store-within-the-toy-store opened (six weeks ago).--[Jennifer M. Brown](#)

home

subscribe

ad rates

drop-in titles

about

current & archived
listings

login/register

search

archived issues

by date

search

news & events

News

Yippee! We have been publishing daily since June of 2005. To see our back issues, [click here](#). If you aren't signed up for daily enlightenment, go to the [subscription page here](#). Thank you!