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## Tireless Book Adventuress Takes Over Orinda Books

By Sophie Braccini



Maria Roden, the new owner of Orinda Books, looks forward to sharing her love of books with the Lamorinda community. Photo Sophie Braccini

Daniel, retired from Chevron. "He is my partner in this venture," she says, "but his role will be more behind the scenes."

Roden moved from England to the United States in 1997, settling in Orinda with her family in 2001. Overseas, she was involved in public relations and communications. "I wanted to try writing, and I enrolled at Saint Mary's College in the Creative Writing M.F.A. program," says Roden, who graduated in 2006. "I discovered that I am a reader, not a writer," she admits. "What I love is to share my passion for books with others; that's why I started working in bookstores."

It is hard for Roden to remain seated at a table for an interview - she constantly rises to fetch a book she recently discovered and wants to share or to guide one through the display of summer reads. This is a woman who just loves books; she reads several every week. When asked to name her favorite book, she answers that it is one of her latest reads, because there is always something new and wonderful to discover.

A brick and mortar bookstore can be a tough business to sustain, but Roden firmly believes that Orinda Books can be profitable. "When Janet (Boreta) owned the bookstore she might not have made a lot of profit, but the business was not in the red," states Roden. She reckons that 40 percent of a bookstore's revenue comes during the holiday season. "For me this is not going to be a big money-making venture," she adds, "but we definitely plan to keep it positive."

"The bookstore couldn't be in better hands," says Molly Young, who worked with Roden at Orinda Books and now manages Mrs. Dalloway's in Berkeley. "Maria (Roden) brings to Orinda Books an incredible energy, lots of experience and a great vision." Young knows that running an independent bookstore is a great deal of work and she believes that Roden is capable of keeping an eye on the bottom line while retaining the store's peaceful character.

Rhoden is keenly aware of the challenge posed by online bookstores, but both she and Young say they have noticed a renewed love for community bookstores, especially those that offer good customer service and next-day availability when books not in stock are ordered before noon.

"A community bookstore has a limited inventory," explains Roden, although her shelves boast more than 10,000 books, "so it reflects the personalities of the owner and staff." Roden is planning

The future of Orinda Books seemed uncertain as longtime owner Janet Boreta prepared to retire. The 38-year-old institution is true north for many Lamorinda book lovers and the place that roughly 100 book clubs call home. But an equally passionate woman stepped forward to assume the challenge of keeping the independent bookstore alive and vibrant - Maria Roden is enthusiastically making plans for the business that she and her husband now own.

"The official handover date was July 1," beams Roden. "I plan to close for just two or three days during a quiet moment in August to get the flooring, paint and layout done. And then full speed ahead with organizing events, community partnerships, and selling books!"

After working at Orinda Books from 2006 to 2012, and then at Rakestraw Books in Danville, when Boreta's retirement presented the opportunity Roden knew that acquiring the bookstore was the right choice. At the same time, Roden's husband,

a "staff's choice" section that will include brief book reviews. She is also seeking young readers who would like to read pre-released books and recommend choices in the youth section.

Roden plans to revitalize Orinda Books by engaging in an events and partnerships-based strategy. Also a director on the Saint Mary's College Master of Fine Arts advisory board, Roden says she is starting to develop a partnership with the college. In addition, she hopes to deepen the connection with local schools and libraries. She wants to expand the store's traditional author events to include more authors - some of whom she already knows, as well as popular authors she plans to invite when she thinks their work is genuine and fits the community.

Roden believes that what comes first is building relationships with local readers. "I plan to be behind the counter as much as possible and on the floor giving advice when it is needed," she says, adding that she enjoys being able to guide people to discover new territories.

"A bookstore is a place that says something about the community that sustains it," says Rhoden. "I really believe in the power of books to create interactions, to learn, to discover. Everyone, of all ages, should have access to browsing inside a bookstore."

Orinda Books

276 Village Square, Orinda

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[www.orindabooks.com](http://www.orindabooks.com)

New hours effective July 1:

Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Sunday 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

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