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<https://www.houseandgarden.co.uk/gallery/best-libraries-in-the-world>

# The world's most extraordinary libraries

By Virginia

Does the sight of a room full of books fill you with joy? This collection of historical and modern temples to literature rounds up the most beautiful libraries in the world

It is a measure of how important books are to us that some of the most beautiful buildings and interiors in the world are libraries. For the centuries before the invention of the printing press, when every book had to be copied by hand, they were our most valuable possessions, and even now, when digitisation and cheap printing make them readily available to everyone, we still treasure the places where we read and study. This collection of libraries takes in everything from spectacular Baroque monasteries to the airy, serene reading rooms of the present day, embracing the best of all spaces to get lost in a book.

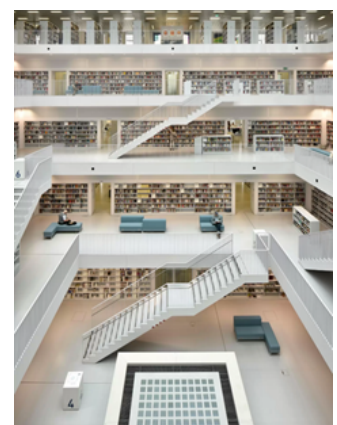


## **STRAHOV MONASTERY LIBRARY, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC**

Prague's Strahov Monastery was founded in 1143 by the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré. It underwent major rebuilding throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, which included the creation of this library, the Theological Hall, in the 1780s. The ceiling fresco by Anton Maulbertsch is a depiction of "The Intellectual Progress of Mankind", from Adam and Eve to the classical philosophers, along with saints and historical figures associated with the abbey. The hall holds more than 42,000 volumes.

## **STADTBIBLIOTHEK STUTTGART, GERMANY**

In 2011, the Stuttgart municipal library moved from its previous home in a former royal palace to this new building designed by Korean architect Young Yi in Mailänder Platz. The building is a grey cube on the outside, but glows blue in the evening. Its openness to people of all nations is symbolised by the inscriptions on the outer walls: the word "Library" in silver letters is in English on the west wall, in German on the north, in Korean on the East and in Arabic on the south.



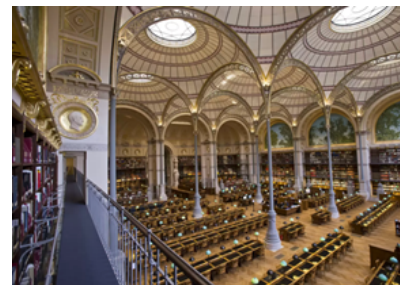


### **BIBLIOTECA JOANINA, COIMBRA, PORTUGAL**

The library of the University of Coimbra dates to the 18th century and the reign of Portugal's King John V, for whom the building is named. It houses around 200,000 volumes within its Baroque interiors, including treasures from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. The library is also famous for its colony of bats, who consume insects that might otherwise damage the rare texts.

### **BIBLIOTHÈQUE RICHELIEU-LOUVOIS, PARIS, FRANCE**

Part of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, this library was originally the royal library, moved to these premises by Louis XIV when the Louvre ran out of storage capacity in the 1660s. The building was once the palace of Cardinal Mazarin, the Chief Minister of France under Louis XIV and



an insatiable book collector. He bequeathed his collection to the state upon his death in 1661, and the library later expanded into the neighbouring buildings. The famous Labrouste Reading Room was designed in the 1860s by Pierre-François-Henri Labrouste, using 16 iron pillars inspired by Parisian markets and railway stations.



### **BEINECKE LIBRARY, YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW HAVEN**

The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library is one of the biggest rare book libraries in the world, housed within a Modernist cube on the Yale campus. The cube shape is echoed on the inside by a central glass stack tower which holds around 100,000 of the library's volumes. A public exhibition hall surrounds it, displaying among other treasured texts one of the 48 extant copies of the Gutenberg Bible.

### **THE BLACKDIAMOND, COPENHAGEN**

The Black Diamond was built in 1999 as an extension to the old building of the Royal Danish Library in central Copenhagen. Designed by Danish architects Schmidt Hammer Lassen, the building is clad in polished black granite, with a striking central 'crevasse' in glass which floods the central atrium with natural light.



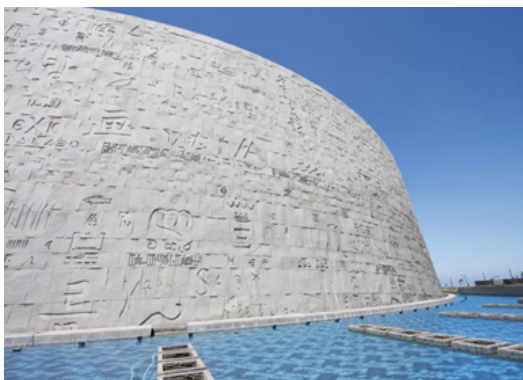


### **THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY, OXFORD**

The Bodleian is one of the oldest libraries in Europe, founded in 1602 as a continuation of an Oxford library which had existed since the early 1300s. A major donation of manuscripts by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester in the 1430s cemented the library's reputation, but the extensive support of Thomas Bodley at the beginning of the 17th century gave the library its name and impressive Gothic buildings. The Bodleian contains one of the most extensive and valuable book collections in the world, including a Gutenberg Bible and the First Folio of Shakespeare.

### **ABBEY OF ST GALL LIBRARY, ST GALLEN**

What started in the seventh century as a hermitage for an Irish monk near the shores of Lake Constance eventually became one of the richest of all medieval monasteries. The library at St Gall has survived fires, invading Magyars, the Reformation, and even the abbey's secularization at the end of the 18th century. It is still one of the most important collections of medieval manuscripts in the world, and houses around 160,000 books in its sumptuous Rococo building.



### **BILIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA, ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT**

The library of ancient Alexandria, built in the 3rd century BC by the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt, was the most significant centre of learning of its time in the world, gathering together a vast collection of Greek texts along with the scholars who flocked to read them. Major advances in

geography, astronomy, and medicine were made at Alexandria until the library declined in importance after the Roman conquest. The current Alexandrian library is a tribute to its ancient predecessor's achievements, as well as an important repository for Arabic and French texts. It celebrates the ideal of global learning in its very architecture: the granite exterior is carved with characters from 120 different languages.

### **LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON DC**

The Library of Congress stretches back to the earliest days of American independence; originally established by James Madison, the library was burned during the British invasion in 1814, and Thomas Jefferson offered up his own personal library to replace its fledgling collection. Now it is said to be the largest library in the world—around 15,000 volumes arrive at its doors every day, since everything published in the US is required to be deposited there. The buildings on Capitol Hill are open to anyone, as long as they sign up for a reader's card.





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### **WREN LIBRARY, TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE**

As its name suggests, the library at Trinity College, Cambridge was a creation of the great architect Sir Christopher Wren. Large windows flood the space with light, while marble busts (mostly carved by) Louis-François Roubiliac of eminent Trinity men keep watch on the scholars as they work. Wren designed the bookcases, each of which features a Grinling Gibbons carving at its end. The library has many important possessions, including the manuscript of Milton's poems and Isaac Newton's notebook.

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