

# A New Chapter For Astoria

*Two women heard the wishes from the community and opened up a general interest bookstore on 31st Street, despite the competition from online retailers .*



**Astoria Bookshop is located at 31-29 31st St. in Astoria, between Broadway at 31st Avenue.**

Photo courtesy of Virginia Watson

*by Virginia Watson*  
Community contributor

**W**hile you can find almost anything in Astoria, one place this neighborhood was lacking was a bookstore. In fact, most of Western Queens did not have a general interest bookstore until Astoria Bookshop officially opened its doors this summer.

Book lovers in Astoria now have their own sanctuary. Owned by Lexi Beach and her wife Connie Rourke, Astoria Bookshop has been a welcome addition to the neighborhood. Located at 31-29 31st Street, there is no doubt that this quaint bookstore has been strongly embraced. "People are so glad there is now a bookstore in the neighborhood", stated Beach. "There has been such an overwhelming and positive response from many members of the community."

## The prologue

Beach first considered the idea of owning a bookstore when she

discovered that people were asking why there wasn't one in Astoria. There seemed to be a hole in the marketplace, especially in a neighborhood like Astoria that supports and is home to many successful small businesses. "I was surprised Astoria had no bookstore," said Beach.

After working in publishing for 10 years and unhappy with her job at the time, Beach really began to wonder if it would be possible to own a bookstore. The major question was if a bookstore could survive, especially when many were forced to close due to competition with online retailers such as

Amazon. This was the unfortunate fate of the former Seaburn Books. However, Beach felt that residents were missing out on what a bookstore could offer and shouldn't have to travel to Manhattan or Brooklyn to buy a book. They soon decided to take the leap and make moves towards owning a bookstore.

Beach spoke with other bookstore owners, attended book-selling workshops and took a month-long entrepreneurship class offered by New York City, where she wrote and developed a business plan. "My mentors are bookstore owners in Brooklyn and other small business owners in Astoria, who have been just so incredibly generous with their time and their knowledge."

## The first chapter

After settling on a space for the bookstore (located only a short distance from the Broadway N and Q subway station), Beach was able to generate a



lot of buzz by utilizing social media, including Facebook and Twitter. "It is important to pay attention to what customers and the community wants," stated Beach. "The business model is much different from 10 years ago."

In addition to a range of carefully selected books, Astoria Bookshop hosts a variety of events, including readings, writing workshops, children's story hour and book groups. Their goal is to be more than just a place to buy books. "A website can't offer events, such as writing workshops or story hour for your kids, or offer the experience of browsing a bookstore," stated Beach. The bookstore will also be able to place a special order for a book that isn't available at the time of the visit for no extra cost.

The biggest difference from her last job said Beach, "It has been a big change from having an office job and working for someone else. It has been a positive experience to talk to customers." Just as before, Beach is continuing to listen to the community. "I have really been trying to listen to what the community wants. I want the store to reflect the neighborhood. Astoria is very diverse. I am trying my best to make it the bookstore they wanted."

Beach is happy with Astoria being the choice of location for the bookstore. "Astoria is a neighborhood that supports small businesses. I don't think I could have opened this store just anywhere. There is no way I would have opened up when I did, if not for the generosity of the community who wanted this to happen just as much as I did."

Visit [astoriabookshop.com](http://astoriabookshop.com) for more information.



**The children's book section inside Astoria Bookshop.**

Photo courtesy of Virginia Watson

# 2013

**Lexi Beach and Connie Rourke set up Astoria's newest bookstore on 31st Street.**

**Astoria Bookshop offers a collection of carefully selected titles, which are divided into various sections such as, Fiction, Non-Fiction, Children, Parenting, Art, Cooking/Food Writing, Gardening, Drama and Travel. The bookstore will also carry books and authors that have a connection to Queens, in order to continue supporting the local community. Electronic books will be available for sale via their website. In addition to books, stationary, cards and other items are offered.**

## INSIDE A GLIMPSE INSIDE THE BOOKSTORE

Open Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Astoria Bookshop easily fits into the neighborhood and fills the literary void. The store has its own character and charm, complete with personal touches, such as a unique counter/desk for the register, a vintage typewriter on the front display table and, of course, a hedgehog pencil holder. If you are unsure of a book to try, look for the handwritten book recommendations. Also, never be afraid to ask. According to Beach, "One of the best parts of my job is getting the opportunity to recommend some of my favorite books to people." —*Virginia Watson*

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**An old typewriter displayed on the new release and featured books table.**

Photo courtesy of Virginia Watson