

I often wonder how other people organize their bookshelves. I suppose that the methods vary as much as the folks who read (or do not read) the volumes they own. I know some people whose books are neatly arranged in alphabetical order according to authors. Others have books grouped in sections by subject matter. Perhaps, librarians shelve their own books just as it would be done in their workplaces. There are also people who just pile their books up here and there, making stacks next to every good reading chair.

Our "system" is not very rigid, and books are often put back in different places from which they came. Usually, most of the books by a particular author are together, but that is not always the case, either. Mostly, though, our method is at least consistent enough that we can find a book we want without searching every shelf.

We have two main bookcases. One consists of those adjustable shelves hanging from metal strips on the wall. That area is in the southwest corner of our cabin above and on both sides of the window there. There is an eight foot long shelf above the window. On the east side there are three shelves each two feet in length, and on the west side the corresponding shelves are one and a half feet long. So, that area of bookshelves totals eighteen and a half feet. There is an additional place for books on top of the built in storage cupboard under the window.

This area of books is at least marginally organized in a relatively unchanging way. The top shelf has Swedish books on the east two thirds and Norwegian books on the other end. The shorter shelves beside the window house books that we consider useful in farming, gardening, nature, etc. Field guides are in this section--books on identifying birds, flowers, trees, lichens, ferns, and reptiles. There are volumes on organic gardening and farming, on the philosophy of land use, and on animal health. Practical guides to woodcraft, sheep shearing, and wild foods reside here, too. And there are other books that we place on these shelves because we use them often and want to find them quickly. And, then, there are the interlopers. We don't really know why they are where they are.

Our other bookcase is a double-sided cherry component that also

serves as a divider between our sleeping area and the rest of the cabin. This bookcase is six and a half feet long with three shelves the full length of each side. The top holds our radio, a kerosene lamp for use if there is a power failure, and a nice wooden box given to us by relatives in Sweden. The side toward our bedroom area holds mostly books we don't use very often. I know to look there for one of my old history textbooks, the maps of various places, some novels, and "overflow" from other parts of the bookcase.

The side toward the rest of the room holds a great variety of reading matter. The books of many of my favorite authors are visible as I sit at the table, and it is sometimes nearly like having special visitors as we sit after a meal and talk. I favor essays, and John McPhee's books are on the top shelf next to Sam Pickering's many volumes. I sometimes wonder if an author would be interested in or curious about his or her place on a reader's shelves. Would Pickering care that he is sandwiched in between John McPhee and Wendell Berry? Would Jim Harrison be pleased that his works are next to Thomas McGuane? And would McGuane be bothered that sometime in the past a Billy Collins book of poetry ended up between two of McGuane's books? Would Ivan Doig be glad that he is in close proximity to E.O. Wilson?

Barbara Kingsolver's books of essays are next to James Herriot's famous series. Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food* are tight against Kurt Vonnegut's *A Man Without a Country*. Some of my old favorites--in worn paperback--huddle together. *Catch-22*, *A Separate Peace*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* occupy a small place on the bottom shelf. And scattered all through the shelves are books we like, fiction and nonfiction, poetry and language, history and fantasy.

I read mostly library books, but when there is a book I want to read again and again or one the library does not have, I sometimes buy a book. It is always interesting to see where it ends up on our shelves.