



Third Place Nooks

Little Free Everything Everywhere

Seattle's ubiquitous sidewalk trading posts build community.

Hobby bakers Paige Stocks (at left below, in rainbow sweater) and Allison Lazarus (at right) drop new goodies Wednesdays at their neighborhood free bakery in Ballard.

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A hot dog cart. A race car long past its prime. A tractor with its paint worn off. All parked on a quiet Fremont street in front of a house with a bright red door. It's the kind of scene that would undoubtedly catch your eye if you were passing through. Just not at the scale you'd be expecting. The whole scene exists in miniature, perched atop a hip-height tree stump in the front yard of a life-size version of that house. The cars, attached now to a Hot Wheels track, were left by neighbors at one of Seattle's many takes on the now-ubiquitous Little Free Library.

Spotting Little Free Libraries—and their creative cousins, like this auto oasis—is the city's easiest game of I Spy. More than 1,100 such depositories are registered with the Little Free Library nonprofit in King County alone, not even counting spawn like a gratis bakery in Ballard and Queen Anne's tiny art gallery.

But they're not just silly sidewalk adornments for well-to-do neighborhoods. In White Center, where most of the children at the local elementary school come from low-income families, an "Impact Library" was planted through a grant program to help kids access books without relying on transportation or school library days. And with full-size diver-



house-turned-car-shop in 2021. Now it gives the fully open playground down the street a run for its money: "Parents have to avoid this spot on the way to the park if they actually

Nextdoor, minuscule meeting places like this one prove that facetime doesn't have to be a rarity. The race car trading post makes a compelling case study: A similar structure across the street, with animals, was part of the inspiration. A neighbor saw the finished product and fashioned a sign. "It makes the neighborhood feel interconnected," Boys says.

That sense of togetherness might just make these petite third places real estate magic, too. Home buyers aren't just looking for four walls and a parking space, says Bushwick Real Estate Services' Rob McGarty. They're looking for a vision of a new and better life. A Little Free Library could be "icing on the cake," McGarty says. Proof of a real-life community that exchanges books, bakes for each other, and even plays with Hot Wheels together. Move here, and that could be you. **S**

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sions off the docket for much of the past few years, these little oases emerged as a much-needed alternative for Seattleites in search of family-friendly activities closer to home.

Faced with the impossible question of what to do with a toddler during the pandemic's ongoing park closures, Fremont resident Alexandria Boys built the doll-

intend on making it there," she says. It's not just kids enthralled with the miniature playhouse either. Boys notices tech bros pause en route to the climbing gym to take a race car for a spin, too.

In a city not exactly known for its hospitality and an era when neighbors often encounter one another only when griping on