



DECORATING WITH BOOKS. Ellen McCrady forwarded an article from *THE NEW YORKER* sent to her by Susan Swartzburg. "Books as Furniture - Annals of Self-estimate" was in the June 12, 1995 issue of *THE NEW YORKER*. Following are some quotes:

"And if I hadn't read 'Tongues of Flame,' I might never have been reminded of the story of another, bigger book fire. It took place in London on Saturday, October 23, 1731, at two o'clock in the morning. What was to be come the library of the British museum - a set of about a thousand books and manuscripts; which included the collection of the old Royal Library, along with the fabulous accumulation of Robert Cotton - was shelved, far too casually, in a room in a house in Westminster, and was overseen (according to Edward Miller's 'That Noble Cabinet') by the son of the by then aged classical scholar Richard Bentley. The room below the library caught fire; tongues of flame found their way up through the wainscoting and reached the backs of the bookcases - or book presses, as they were often called - and, as the conjoined libraries began to sigh and crackle, the Speaker of the House of Commons, who lived nearby and had hurried over when he heard the clamor, plucked warm and smoking bundles of ancient parchment off the shelves and tossed them out the window to save them. Like Chuck Yeager, smoke-smirched but ambulatory after his plane crash at the end of 'The Right Stuff,' Dr. Bentley himself emerged from the conflagration with the Codex Alexandrinus, the priceless fifth-century manuscript of the Greek Bible in his arms. He was dressed in his nightgown, but had apparently taken a moment, in the name of scholarly dignity, to slap on his wig. A hundred and fourteen books were ruined or lost that night - some of them 'burnt to a Crust,' many of them irreplaceable - and a number of the ones that had been flung out the window to safety were swept together into heaps of shuffled and water-damaged pages and boxed away. Librarians didn't succeed in restoring order to some of the surviving fragments until a century later."

"Well, this is true. Bookcases, or book cupboards, were called armaria as early as the first century, when some books were still published - that is, multiply copied - on rolls (volumina), and stored on their sides, with little tags hanging from their ends which bore their titles. Seneca, who died in the year 65, rather scornfully mentions book-bearing armoires inlaid with ivory in his essay 'On Tranquillity of Mind.' And in one of the earliest surviving pictures of a book armoire, found in a manuscript called the Codex Amiatinus, from the eighth century (but possibly copied from an earlier, now lost manuscript, the Codex Grandior), the books, large and bound in red, lie flat on the shelves, with the doors of the