

FEATURES

LIBRARIES, REDISCOVERED

By Varun Godinho
All images by Massimo Listri/Taschen

Italian photographer Massimo Listri travelled the world to photograph a number of the world's oldest and most opulent libraries for his 560-page Taschen book titled **The World's Most Beautiful Libraries**







Massimo Listri gained unprecedented access to 55 private, educational, public and monastic libraries spanning 16 countries and dating as far back as 766AD filled with precious and historical manuscripts, papyrus scrolls and tomes.

These libraries include the papal collections of the Vatican Apostolic Library; the Trinity College Library which is home to the Book of Kells and Book of Durrow; and even the private library of the powerful House of Medici in Florence called the Laurentian Library that was designed by Michelangelo.

Listri's photography shows that these libraries are as much repositories for some of the world's rarest literary works as they are spaces of stunning architecture constructed across an array of styles from medieval and baroque to classical and 19th century.

The text accompanying the photographs in *The World's Most Beautiful Libraries* is compiled by Georg Ruppelt and Elisabeth Sladek and reveals fascinating insights into these libraries. Learn about the Real Gabinete Português de Leitura in Rio de Janeiro which was founded in 1837 by a group of Portuguese immigrants to promote culture among the Portuguese community or the Stiftsbibliothek Sankt Gallen in St Gallen which is not only the oldest library in Switzerland but also one of the most important monastic libraries in the world.

Then there's the Strahovská Knihovna in Prague that has two grand baroque halls that are off limits to visitors because the fluctuations in humidity could affect the ceiling paintings.

Perhaps most intriguingly, the Biblioteca Joanina in Coimbra, is one of only two museums in the world that houses bats to protect the books from insects. ●



Massimo Listri:
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From top: Strahovská Knihovna, Prague, Czech Republic; Stiftsbibliothek Kremsmünster, Kremsmünster Austria