

# MIAMI New Times®



Jennine Capó Crucet will once again participate in the Miami Book Fair. / Photo by Monica McGivern

## Local Authors Are the Backbone of Miami Book Fair 2019

**CAROLINA DEL BUSTO** | NOVEMBER 14, 2019 | 8:00AM

Mitchell Kaplan, Miami's formidable bookseller, makes his way to a small table at the café in the corner of Books & Books in Coral Gables. His worn leather bag slouches on his right shoulder. It's the end of the workday for Kaplan, as evidenced by his rolled-up sleeves and disheveled hair. His round spectacles peek from their resting place atop his salt-and-pepper ringlets.

The Miami Beach native has been in the business of selling books for almost 40 years, and 2019 marks the 35th edition of the Miami Book Fair, an event he cofounded in 1984.

“My DNA is very much wrapped up with the Miami Book Fair and Books & Books,” Kaplan says. Searching for the right word, he pauses and then adds, “I’m very proud to have been a part of starting something that has lasted for so long and has had such an impact in the city I grew up in.”

The nature of Kaplan’s work puts the bookseller in constant contact with writers. Thousands of authors – local, national, and international – have walked on the echoing wood floors of Books & Books’ Gables location, many of whom are participating in this year’s Miami Book Fair.

**Edwidge Danticat** is no stranger to the annual literary celebration. The Haitian-American author will once again be in attendance, this time promoting her latest book, a collection of eight stories, *Everything Inside*. “I’ve known Edwidge since she was very, very young,” Kaplan says, leaning forward and resting his chin on his palm. Without hesitation, he adds, “I think she’s one of the greatest writers of her generation.”

Danticat is set to participate in four sessions, including a panel with fellow Caribbean authors Saturday, November 23, and a conversation with the famed poet and Miamian **Richard Blanco** Sunday, November 24.

Although Kaplan has not known Cuban author **Uva de Aragón** as long as he’s known Danticat, he did, however, publish one of her books. Books & Books Press, along with Mango Publications, released de Aragón’s *Miracle of Saint Lazarus* earlier this year. In a serendipitous interaction, Kaplan met Jeffrey C. Barnett and Kathleen Bulger-Barnett at his bookstore. The pair was in the process of translating de Aragón’s latest work, and Kaplan jumped at the chance to publish it.



Author Uva de Aragón will speak about the Caribbean's influence on her writing. / **Courtesy of Miami Book Fair**

“I’ve always been a fan of Uva’s even though I don’t read Spanish,” Kaplan says. “She draws her characters so vividly, and this new book is a real down-and-out mystery.”

De Aragón will speak on the panel Caribbean Journeys Through Time and Space on Saturday, November 23.

For mystery lovers who'll be left longing for more after de Aragón's talk, there'll be an entire session just for them. The panel Florida Mystery and Suspense, taking place Sunday, November 24, will present three local authors – **Alex Segura**, **James Grippando**, and **Tim Dorsey** – peddling their latest thrillers.

Kaplan is a fan of Segura, who most recently read at Books & Books' Gables location last year and recently released the final installment in his Peter Fernandez series, *Miami Midnight*. “Alex has been writing these fantastic mysteries for years, and his work is much admired, not only by me but by others who are writing in that genre as well,” Kaplan says.

**Les Standiford**, whom Kaplan calls an old friend, is another local author and educator participating in this year's fair. In his latest nonfiction book, *Palm Beach, Mar-a-Lago, and the Rise of America's Xanadu*, Standiford traces the history of one of Florida's wealthiest zip codes.

"Standiford started out as a mystery writer and then moved into nonfiction," Kaplan says, noting how the author's writing style has expanded. "He's able to sustain a very strong narrative, so you're pulled through it the way you are through the best of creative nonfiction writers."

Hear more about the upper-class city's past and its famous residents during American Histories on Saturday, November 23.

Another Book Fair veteran and Miami native is the Hialeah-bred **Jennine Capó Crucet**. In her newest collection of essays, *My Time Among the Whites*, the author chronicles her experience of feeling "othered" while trying to fit into a society preoccupied with whiteness. She'll speak at Immigrant Tales on Sunday, November 24.

"There was a sense of recognition in it for me," Kaplan says of Capó Crucet's essays. "We both come from immigrant worlds. Even though I come from a Jewish background and she's Cuban-American, there was a real sense of recognition that I felt with her book... I was blown away by it."

Kaplan notes a simple truth about the Magic City's annual literary fest: "The fair has made people outside of South Florida take note of the fact that Miami isn't just a sun-and-fun capital," he says. "There are some very serious issues here that are being explored by the literary community, and it's because of the book fair that people have come and discovered Miami."

**Miami Book Fair.** Sunday, November 17, through Sunday, November 24, at Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus, 600 Biscayne Blvd., Miami; [miamibookfair.com](http://miamibookfair.com).

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