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The Library

*Tomorrow's libraries
will have the same
components but
on a new scale*

Reloaded

By Brian Kenney

EVERY SUCCESSFUL NEW library building is unique. Each is a synthesis of the desires of a specific community, the ambitions of the library staff, and the solutions of architects and designers. Nonetheless, the individuals who are creating tomorrow's libraries have clearly identified common factors that will drive public library design.

Planners report that Americans today, no matter where they live, want a sense of community from institutions. At the same time, Americans have less free time but value convenience more. Web technology diminishes the distance between home (or the library) and school, work, or city hall. People are changing how they seek information to take advantage of web content. New formats, from streaming video to digital media, also mean new design demands. Changing demographics force service providers to reanalyze their populations.

The facilities getting planned on today's drafting tables will respond to these forces and more. As a result, expect the proportions to shift. Looking at libraries open-

ing in six or seven years will be like looking in a fun-house mirror: the parts will be there, but the scale will be brand new.

Branches get their due

If the 1990s were known for high-profile, big-budget central libraries, the next decade may well be about the renaissance of neighborhood branches. Joseph Rizzo of the Hillier Group cites many master plans, from Dallas to Los Angeles, that seek to renew community libraries. Some of these libraries have gotten their central house in order and can now afford to focus on local service. Others are reenvisioning all services and facilities together.

Branches aren't sexy like their downtown relatives, and it can be harder to raise funds, political backing, and media interest for buildings serving narrower constituencies.

"But by building wonderful branches, we're saying to the neighborhood: This is what you deserve," says Brooklyn Public Library executive director Ginnie Cooper, who expanded the branches of the Multnomah County Library, OR, before moving to Brooklyn. "We may be segmented by where we go to school, shop, or worship," Cooper adds, "but the local library is where you go to encounter your community."

Baltimore's Enoch Pratt Free Library is planning its first "anchor branch" in the Highlandtown community, featuring a drive-in window, a meeting room for 175, and a large, enclosed atrium. Pratt leadership expects this branch to jump-start a neighborhood, much like central libraries bolster downtown areas. "This construction will revitalize the nearby business corridor," says Betty Boulware, chief of neighborhood services. "We expect business to be booming."

In the fast growing Maricopa County Library District, AZ, Director Harry Courtright is planning more branches, but he's downsizing them. "I would rather have several branches in the 20,000-30,000 square foot range than another 80,000 square foot facility," he says. Courtright is impressed with the power a small branch can pack with electronic content. He's trading in the space once used for large reference collec-



FORM FOLLOWS FUTURE

At the Saint Louis Public Library (l.), a modern, light-filled Welcome Center will attract users to the Central Library. A "Collection Interface Zone" combines display shelving, ceiling forms, and lighting to highlight materials at the Worcester Public Library, MA (r.)

tions, journal runs, and microfilm for room for the maximum number of computers.

Branches can provide much of what we expected in a central building, with the convenience today's public demands. "The time of big information centers is gone," says Cooper. "We don't need those information silos."

Mixing it up

Librarians know that being near retail and service outlets increases usage. Now, library planners are looking beyond location to help create larger environments in which libraries can thrive. These mixed-use projects can include parks, schools, cafés, parking, housing, and stores.

The Princeton Public Library, NJ, wanted a new facility in its popular downtown location but was unable to expand parking without getting creative. The library board director convinced the local government to solicit proposals for the development of the surface parking area next to the library. The resulting mixed-use public/private development has retail shops on the first floor, housing above, and enough parking on the upper floors to support the library, now under construction.

Some libraries plan to partner with private organizations to get new buildings as well. They have prime real estate—a well-trafficked corner—but a worn-out facility and few funding streams for new construction. Hillier's Rizzo is currently in discussion with officials in the District of Columbia to do this at the Tenley-Friendship Branch, scheduled to be demolished, then rebuilt.

Design for the street

Your favorite historic library building probably has thick walls and few windows. To some it is grand, but to many it feels formal and austere. It is a place for serious work. That design, long in decline, focused on warehousing and protecting materials rather than circulating them.

"Today people are interested in a modernist aesthetic, one that emphasizes natural light and transparency," says architect John Howard of Becker and Frondorf. When architects mention transparency, they mean just that—the ability to look inside from outside, making library collections and services seem more accessible. Howard, who is working with Philadelphia's Free Library on the redesign of its central library, points out that all four of the proposals the library solicited had a "glass skin."

There are other ways to expose a library. In Dallas, a similar plan would open up a walkway on the first floor of the central library, outfitting it with a café, wireless access, a news wall, and, perhaps, other retail ventures. "We have to grab people's attention and show that libraries aren't scary," Rizzo says.

The St. Louis Public Library is re-designing its street-level access. The most active entry for its historic central library is currently a dark, crowded, and unattractive maze. The new modern design, located beneath the grand staircase, will create an inviting and spacious experience.

The destination library

We know the superstore drill: over-stuffed chairs, a café, low bookshelves, ambient lighting, eye-catching merchandising. Its success is affecting library design, and librarians are examining what makes these stores flourish to extract what might work for them. New hybrids are emerging.

Librarians who want to create spaces that are attractive to their communities are driving this model, says Jeffrey Hoover, prin-

cipal, Tappé Associates. They realize that they are competing for people's time and recognize that providing depth of information is no longer enough. In addition to traditional services, people need a place to mingle, to enjoy themselves. A central zone near the building's opening serves as a gathering place, often with a café. New books are typically presented here in a high-profile way.

A destination library presents the collections with patron interaction in mind. The book stacks are replaced by units that are typically three shelves high. The top of each is used for face-out display that takes advantage of traffic. The ends of each unit "merchandise" books, with foot candles to make the books glow.

Hoover gutted the five-floor stack wing of the historic New Bedford Public Library, MA. He replaced it with three floors with wide aisles, mixed seating, computers, and lower shelving. With the expansion of the Worcester Public Library, MA, Hoover didn't use the increased space to move more material onto the floor. Instead, he created a 300'-long circulation spine that runs through three floors as a "collection interface zone." At points along the spine, mobile units create display opportunities.

Signage, Hoover says, must explain the subject areas in a way that makes sense, and the arrangement of the collection should be as intuitive as possible. One eagerly awaited solution is Rem Koolhaas's design for Seattle's new 35,000 square foot central library, scheduled to open in 2004. Here the collection will gently slope along a spiral through four floors. In Dewey Decimal order, the books will be displayed for browsing and easy access.

Bookstore-oriented shelving does demand smaller collections—New Bedford's collection shrunk by nearly 50 percent. The paradox is that smaller collections that are well presented circulate far better than research-oriented stacks.

Keep it flexible

"The engineering challenge is to specify the best possible infrastructure to serve flexible growth over time," says Elisabeth Martin, architect and library consultant. "Collections transform, use patterns evolve, services respond to changed needs, and building systems improve, but technology changes most dramatically."

In Salt Lake City's new central library, Moshe Safdie employed all-access flooring, a new flooring invented to accommodate changing technology. Every 16 inches a panel allows wiring to be pulled up. It is expensive, but it lets libraries reorganize departments and services with ease. According to Howard, HVAC systems have also caught up, allowing libraries to update heating and air conditioning with similar flexibility.

Wireless access also provides flexibility. A library may plan for a fixed number of workstations but accommodate dozens more users with wireless access. Wireless also allows a room to house a preschool program in the morning, then a technology club after school, with kids using laptops with wireless access.

Interior design must also provide flexibility; librarians expect their spaces to do double duty. Princeton's new library will have a technology training lab that will serve as a discovery center—where patrons can experience new technology like handheld computers and iPods.

Flexibility isn't all about technology. In Maricopa County, Courtright says that all his new facilities are being designed as one large, open space. This allows the library to use interior design to expand or contract areas, such as a young adult area, as demographics shift.

RFID impacts design

"The traditional circulation desk won't be around much longer," predicts Alan Kirk Gray, head of technology at the Darien Library, CT. Gray believes that RFID technology will make obsolete "the vast majority of transactions between library workers and people that involve handling items."

RFID—famously implemented by the Singapore public library system—has been around for years, but adoption has been slow in the United States. It is gaining broader acceptance in the society at large as companies like Wal-Mart begin to use it. This should drive down costs and increase functions.

Gray expects RFID to have a significant impact on Darien's design. The circulation desk will be eliminated. This allows librarians to rethink entrances and poten-

A Carnegie for a New Century

When the South Norwalk Branch Library, CT, reopens in 2006, residents will find the old reference room on the front of the building transformed into a 20-computer reference area. "Our reference print collection is rarely used, and most of the material is now online," says Reginald St. Fort, branch librarian. "We'll condense the reference collection to one shelf."

Part of the Norwalk PL, the 13,000 square foot Carnegie branch, is set to begin a \$3.3 million renovation and expansion that will add over 4000 square feet—most of which will be used for children's and young adult areas. The branch, which opened in 1913, serves a diverse population of around 30,000.

The branch will reopen with 40 computer workstations, up from the six it has today. The children's room gets the other 20. Robust connectivity will come from the city's fiber optics line, allowing the library to tap into a film library or present distance learning classes. Wireless access—a real help when renovating an older building, St.

Fort says—will be integrated throughout. Librarians will conduct computer training classes with laptops in the auditorium.

The periodicals room, across from the reference area, will become a reading lounge—electronic subscriptions allow St. Fort to eliminate periodical back runs. The room will feature soft seating, and low shelving will be used to display popular books and current journals, as well as videos and DVDs, which now account for 50 percent of the circulation.



Reginald St. Fort (c.) with South Norwalk Branch Library patrons

Like many Carnegie buildings, the back of the building houses the stacks. These 8' stacks will get trimmed down, made brighter. Additional seating for studying and collaboration will be placed throughout. The library will reopen with 50,000 volumes, about half of what it holds today.

While the original entrance will be preserved, a new, glass side entrance will open to an expanded parking lot—reflecting how most users get to the branch. "With this renovation," says St. Fort, "we're placing the library back in the center of the community."

tially deploy staff in more meaningful jobs. Libraries need to determine where to place self-check stations and how to handle what Gray describes as "concierge activities" that happen at a circulation desk.

Maricopa has invested heavily in RFID. The 13-branch system should be completely self-check in a year or so. Most of the libraries will have one information desk staffed by a blend of library workers who deal with everything from familiarizing users with self-check and assisting with technology to fielding reference queries.

Beyond self-checkout, RFID can affect the entire process of materials handling. The Clinton-Macomb Public Library, MI, opened a new facility in fall 2003 that uses RFID throughout the circulation process, from self-check to self-return, with an automated sortation system that brings material right to the book truck for shelving.

Build for tomorrow

Ours is hardly a post-print society, but print is competing with a host of other formats. Twenty-first-century functionality requires access to the highest level of tech-

nology, including high-speed connections and optimal hardware. A robust media center is key, including listening, viewing, and editing stations. A building should include a state-of-the-art auditorium, Martin believes, along with suites for working with text and visual media that can be used for training and collaboration.

The United States may see its first such facility in Brooklyn PL's Visual and Performing Arts Library. Designed in 2002 by Enrique Norten of TEN Arquitectos, the 150,000 square foot, \$75 million facility will house a circulating book collection, galleries, studios, a black box theater, a 24/7 media lounge, a high-tech auditorium, children's art programming spaces, and a café. Designed as a V-shaped wedge, its glass surface is open and permeable, inviting pedestrians to enter.

Norten's building is the library that planners are creating for tomorrow: flexible, inviting, connected to the world outside. It is a community place that will delight users with its beauty while providing the varied collections that will support entertainment and learning into the 21st century. ■