

**T**he public library is a place with unique energy. Individuals gather peacefully to gain access to information and to share in a community place. The architectural intervention, interior design, and technology can coalesce into a dynamic people place and have a transforming effect in shaping lives. The design, programs, services, and staff come together to create an inviting place. A welcoming public library with special spaces for children and teens has great potential to influence individuals and society in a positive way. For many young people the public library offers the first glimpse of independence, confirmed and symbolized by the issuance of the first library card.

The role of design in creating environments for youth can extend from decisions to create themed environments that suggest storybook qualities to more subtle, but nevertheless intentional, architectural expressions that spark the imagination. Both approaches have their advocates. There also remain professionals who believe there is no worthy rationale to warrant either approach and, instead, believe that the child's imagination is expected to be complete and not in need of any encouragement. This latter view, however steadfast, is contrary to the consumer industry that thrives on selling products to children and teens.

### **THE INFLUENCE OF MERCHANDISING**

It seems no less important in designing spaces for children to consider the impact of the space on the child than to consider the appeal of a box of children's cereal on the supermarket shelves, including its placement at the height of the cart's child seat. Think of the toddler reaching out toward an attractive product on the shelf. One has to consider the elements of design—color, pattern, images—that capture the attention of the child. This is not to say that building space intended for use by children and adolescents should aspire solely to attention-catching devices and marketing gimmicks. It is essential, however, to consider the appeal to and reactions of young people to various design devices when planning space, especially in the public arena.

Architect Robert Miller described for us his perspective regarding the design of the recently completed Ballard branch of the Seattle Public Library (figure 6.1):

There is a . . . pronounced emphasis on the kids' area in Ballard, however, it is not adorned with the stereotypical bright colors and animated icons. These are icons adults have placed on children. Children themselves have limitless imaginations, as evidenced by the ability to find hours of amusement with something as simple as a

cardboard box. The space has a curved window wall system that refracts light and views into, over, and under flora and fauna. It has special bookshelves, special reading benches and accommodations for reading groups.

The children's area also has a few "surprises" such as a periscope that can be discovered in the cracks between the siding boards. The Ballard space has "vitrines" that display disassembled instruments but also look into the meeting room at a kid's eye level. These puncture through the reflective curved metal wall skin of the multi-purpose room that bounds the children's area. The entire building has a green emphasis and serves double duty as a learning tool for the relationship of the user and the environment. We have tended to treat the children's areas to more closely parallel the adult areas with added imaginative twists to make the space their own and also reward the inquisitive and curious. Hopefully they will leave the library with an awareness of their environment more cerebral than Teletubbies and teddy bears.

Merchandising, lighting, scale, and clarity reinforce the message—whether the message is for a sugar-coated breakfast cereal, Teletubbies, or children's literature. Design is integral in creating an environment that encourages a particular behavior or mood. Lack of good design can hinder the message or even obscure it. Much of the success of mass-merchandising retail giants lies in clarity. The reduced need for sales staff to assist the customer underscores the profitability of the venture and encourages self-reliance on the part of the customer.

It is important to consider this effect when designing youth spaces in a library. If finding reading materials can be likened to finding a needle in a haystack, then the mission of promoting literacy and self-reliance will be obscured or eliminated. Planning clear, logical sequences of space—open and uncluttered—serves to reinforce the self-reliance and development that is at the heart of service to children and teens. In the children's room at the Middle Country Public Library, "there is an accent wall that wriggles around, that brings the toddlers back into the Family Place area, and it's something that is very orange and bright and lively. They can follow this curve to where they are going to go and have their seats and have their programs take place too" (Daria Pizzetta, interview, October 2004).

## THEMES

Architectural elements are the most timeless and cost-effective features to use in creating space for children, but several leading library and design professionals in the past

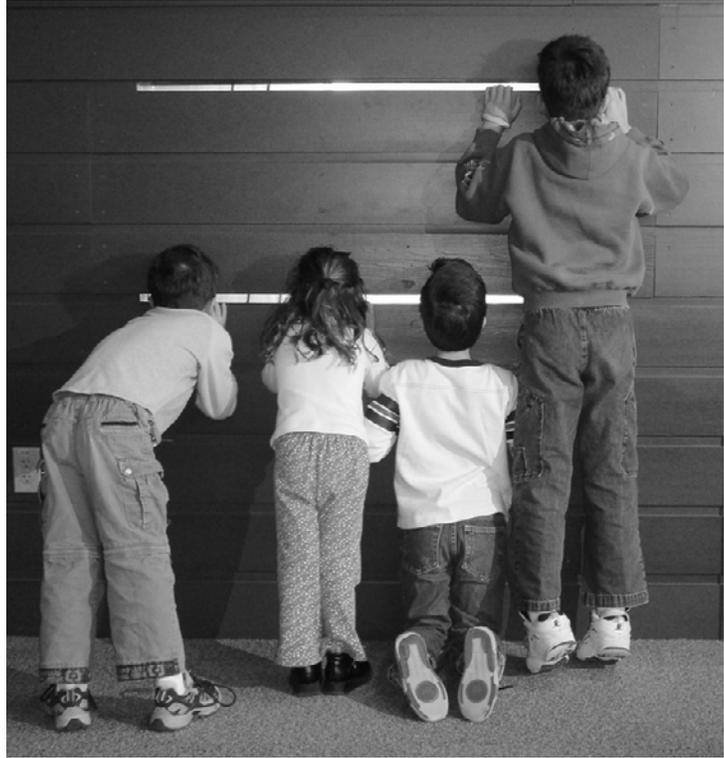


Photo credit: Bohlin Cywinski Jackson

**FIGURE 6.1** Children's area, Seattle Public Library, Ballard Branch, Seattle, Wash. Architect, Bohlin Cywinski Jackson. Used by permission of the architect and photographer.

decade have promoted themed environments as a way to engage young people and enhance the ambiance of the library's space. Borrowing cues from amusement parks, these libraries have implemented forest themes, castles, and other whimsical elements in an effort to make the library relevant and attractive to children and families. These themes range in complexity and cost from murals on the wall to complete themed environments, constructed of fiberglass and other strong materials similar to theme parks such as Disney and Universal. The proponents of themed designs offer a viable approach to making the library more attractive to youth and have been successful in reaching many people through these special environments. Still, themed environments need to be approached with caution. Nolan Lushington explains:

Children's facilities are often designed to attract children with playful concepts. . . . Trying too hard to make it into an actual ocean liner [train station, castle, town] can look cute and corny and be boring in time. Murals, furnishings, and equipment should encourage children's imagination to make them what they will. The platform can be a deck, a balloon floating in the sky, or a space station depending on the child's imagination. . . . Classic and durable images should grace some of the walls of the children's areas and should flow naturally from the library's function to stimulate the imagination and offer children a variety of materials and ways to experience these materials. (2002, 131–32)

Achieving whimsy, imagination, and awe in library design is an outgrowth of the entertainment industry. Though the human imagination is unquestionably more vivid than graphic media, there exists an intrinsic relationship between brain development and visual stimulation. A child comprehends images in a picture book long before he or she can read text. It stands to reason that, likewise, the same child will relate to a color on the carpet or a storybook fantasy long before or even concurrent with developing their imaginations. The human response to visual stimuli is the engine behind travel magazines.

The imagination must be fed in order to grow. It is also true that creative visioning is not equal among children, teens, and adults. Some young people have vivid imaginations; others may be more limited to understanding what they actually have seen. The more a child or teen sees, the greater their kit of information from which to formulate other imaginative scenarios.

When asked about using any special kind of description or design language for the children's room at the Schaumburg (Ill.) Public Library, Denelle Wrightson, architect for the project, responded that the specially constructed indoor garden in the children's room was playful. It brought literature alive.

It's just very nice to experience the life-size characters [Tom Kitten from Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit series and Tomie dePaola's wonderful characters], because to a child they are bigger than life. Usually children are reading a "little" Beatrix Potter book and making those connections makes it really playful. It's like they are really in Peter Rabbit's house or pretending to be Peter Rabbit. . . . Going through the illustrations first, seeing the connection; this is a piece of art that then becomes put with words. "Entering the garden" and going into the illustrations that are out of scale and lifelike is a lot of fun. I like that progression and tie between literature and life-size characters. There's almost a traditional sense of connection to those murals that you would have

found at the beginning of the last century, and a lot bigger; they are timeless too. We focused on characters from books that would have a life, not trendy.

The most important consideration in this approach is that the environments do not become awash in “little kiddie” design features that are akin to baby talk. Although themed environments can be a wonderful and appropriate mechanism to bring children into the library, it is important to consider that this is just one method of creating space that is inviting. Keep in mind that young people have vivid and active imaginations, and that the environments that are specially created for children may better serve the task by allowing for spontaneity and stimulation of the child’s imagination. Strong, single-minded themes may be limiting. Many recent children’s library spaces seem to be like the coloring book that has already been colored—there is little room for the imagination.

Like children’s spaces, the design of teen areas is heavily influenced by a themed approach. Kim Bolan cautions us to “try to stay away from trendy themes that involve permanent or costly items” (2003, 57). These areas may attract teens initially, but they often become stale and out-of-date quickly. The organization of the room to include the functions important to teens (conversation, interaction, study, and technology) with basic furniture elements (counters, computers, and comfortable chairs) and colors and decorations that excite but are easily adapted may be the best approach. This way, the theme can be easily changed with new generations.

## IMAGINATION AND WHIMSY

Imagination in design is the province of all the stakeholders in the design collaboration. The imagination or dreaming stage of a project is an open design exercise and should be fun and engaging. It is critical to imagine the space designed for the age of the audience it is intended to serve. The most successful design results are always the result of a collaboration of client and design professionals. The gifted design professional coalesces many ideas into a synthesis of design to reflect the notions and creativity of the participants—staff, board, and community members (a must for teens)—alike.

The children’s room will have several distinct areas arranged to invite children, parents and caregivers to move through the space in accordance with the child’s conceptual development. . . . Each of the areas should serve as an imaginal landscape of the developmental period. The space should invoke a sense of creative discovery while also allowing containment for the projection and experience of the child’s own imaginal field—a real field of dreams that encourages and supports a variety of imaginative feelings and creative thought. (Lushington 2008, 50)

Adolescent spaces, on the other hand, are most effectively “imagined” with teens. Young adults gravitate toward trendy, popular décor, but it is often difficult for adults to determine just what that décor would look like. Different communities and differ-

Images should flow naturally from the library’s function to stimulate the imagination and to offer children a variety of materials and ways to experience these materials. Explicit themes may be of interest during the first visit, but they become stale and boring on repeated exposure and have little relevance to the imaginative world that library books create. It may be better to create frequently changing, interactive learning experiences with a variety of exhibits mounted on mobile carts or fitting right into the bookshelves.

—Nolan Lushington (2008, 51)

ent groups of teens are the library's best bet for gaining much-needed specific input. Bolan reflects on selecting themes for teens:

Potential themes for teen spaces are everywhere. Just take a look at what's going on in the world and what's popular. . . . [Be careful] about not choosing themes and related décor that are either too adult or too juvenile. . . . pick something that will be popular with males and females. It is essential that you involve teens in this entire process because you might think you have the best idea in the world for a young adult area but teenagers might have a totally different opinion. (2003, 58)

A synonym of imagination is fantasy. There is a place for fantasy in space design for children. This may be fantastic shapes and inventive fenestration or the manner of introducing natural light into space. Fantasy may be a simulation of the constellations, as in the Enoch Pratt Free Library's central library children's program room. Fantasy may be a larger-than-life mural created by a brilliant illustrator, such as Maurice Sendak's mural "The Wild Things" in the Richland County (S.C.) main library—described for us by library director David Warren:

It's like a park. It is beautiful. Especially when the sun comes in the morning and it goes through the trees and it catches shadows just like the mural. The mural one sees is of "The Wild Things" swinging from the trees, with actual trees in front of the mural. It's three dimensional. When you walk in you see the live trees and behind it you see the mural with the trees and they all just blend together, so that the "Wild Things" look like they are hanging on real trees rather than just on the mural.

Many youth spaces can be enhanced with themed or decorative whimsical elements. Think of whimsy as something intended to be unusual and amusing—but in fact of little definitive purpose; there is a place for such whimsy in design for young people. Everything in art and design does not need a particular purpose. To delight and amuse is, in and of itself, serving a purpose.

In the Eastwick branch design of the Free Library of Philadelphia, the VITETTA team converted a leaking, obsolete fireplace story pit into a "train place" with an accompanying mural (figure 6.2). This renovation had a limited budget, and the mural included a scene with a cowboy on a horse (symbolizing the west) facing an otherwise specifically local array of themes—airplane, trains, and skyline of Philadelphia. The "train place" included ideas from the branch staff, administrators, and the design team, focusing on a whimsical interpretation of notions, which together successfully transformed the space into a fun, inviting, and accessible place.

## THE "WOW!" FACTOR

Though avoiding themed environments in the extreme may be a goal, libraries do have to compete for the general public's attention. We want children and teens to choose the library as a destination, and we also want the library to have a vivid, welcoming environment "right from the start" of the visitor experience. To accomplish this, architects and designers along with youth services staff have reached outside the library's traditional past to other venues for creative ideas and dramatic effects. To some in the field, this has come to be known as the "Wow!" factor.



**FIGURE 6.2** Story area before renovation (left) and after (right), Free Library of Philadelphia, Eastwick Branch, Philadelphia, Pa. Architect, VITETTA. Used by permission of the architect.

Photo credits: Joanne Bening/VITETTA

When VITETTA started the Free Library of Philadelphia branch renovations, there were so many mixed messages that we held a special, long meeting and talked about what “Wow” meant. What was the preschool or the children’s area supposed to be? Themed? Not themed? Some replied that it shouldn’t be themed, some that it should. Should it be a special interest area? Every library should have a special interest area—sometimes for children, sometimes teens, or seniors. Nobody could agree on what these things meant. It was difficult to design something when no one on the library side knew or agreed about what any of these things meant.

We had a myriad of ideas of what “special interest area” and “Wow” meant. At the conclusion of our meeting, we finally agreed on an approach that carried through all eighteen of the VITETTA renovations. And it was what we defined as the “Wow!” factor: that patrons came into the building after it was renovated and stood there and their mouths dropped open and they literally said, “Wow, this is different.” Something had happened; they didn’t come in and say, “Oh, okay, it looks nicer—maybe?” It was everyone’s goal that in each branch, when anyone walked in off the street (even if they had not been in the building before), they would say, “Wow, there is something really special about this place.”

## STRUCTURES AND OBJECTS

Objects to integrate into youth spaces may include sculptural art, architectural objects/fragments including colored glass, and structures that define space such as kiosks or



Photo credit: Santiago Public Library

**FIGURE 6.3** Reading cylinders, young children's area, Santiago Public Library, Santiago, Chile. Architect, Cox and Ugarte; Design Consultant, VITETTA; Industrial Designer, NAVE. Used by permission of the library.



Photo credit: Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library

**FIGURE 6.4** Curve World learning area with the Vortex, Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, Central Library, Indianapolis, Ind. Used by permission of the library.

tented areas, curved walls, arbors, or special doorways. Tenting or other structures within a space can create fun zones for special activities in the library. The Amsterdam (Netherlands) Public Library has circular pods for children of different ages that include entertaining places to sit, computers at different heights, and other functional and fun accommodations (see plate 11).

In the Santiago (Chile) Public Library, architects Cox and Ugarte created futuristic cylinders, some suspended from the ceiling of the children's area as though they are levitating above the floor (figure 6.3). These elements bring together space-age fantasy and imagination while providing practical, cozy zones for small children to gather and read or be read to. Children flock to sit in or under these colorful forms. Although these wonderful elements may evoke images from science fiction, they are timeless and not specific to a particular story or theme.

A space itself can encourage participation and enthusiasm for literacy and learning. The Learning Curve at the central facility of the Indianapolis Marion County Public Library is a great example of reinforcing programming with design or vice versa (figure 6.4). The design of the space encourages contact with different areas of learning and growth through the organization of the space itself. The Learning Curve (<http://curve.imcpl.org>) offers a typical array of programs with titles like "Curve World," "Introduction to Robots," and "Star Search." The space is arrayed with collections, special features, lighting effects, and fun places to sit, read, and experience information. Natural light is abundant by day, and carefully designed interior lighting invites people into and through the space at night.

The Learning Curve creatively combines all of the necessities of a children's library—shelving, seating, and computers—into objects unto themselves. The shelves, for example, are not just rows of stacks but sculptural elements that define the space with special lighting. The computers, including portable computers on stands, are among the many inviting settings in this space and each an object of sorts. The library brought in the interactive entertainment team Funny Garbage to launch Curve World, an interactive literacy learning game, to coincide with the launch of the dynamic space. The Funny Garbage website describes the space:

Let's face it: we all grow up hoping one day to have the chance to hurtle through space piloting a rocket-propelled wheel of cheese. It goes without saying. Well, now lucky students visiting The Learning Curve at Central Library in Indianapolis are able to *live* that dream—while strengthening literacy in information, technology and media along the way—as they blast off into CurveWorld!

Curve World is actually a game-like interactive educational experience that is part of the Learning Curve. Focused on improving students' understanding and use of evolving digital media, CurveWorld provides a hands-on, immersive learning environment that engages the user's creativity and motivates intellectual curiosity.

To begin their exploration of the virtual cosmos, children construct personalized transporters—strapping rocket boosters to lipstick, flying-V guitars and, yes, cheese—to navigate through space. After take-off, students chart their own courses, interacting with each other while also creating and sharing art, audio, video, and other projects. Through these activities, kids gain practical experience with real-life technology in a safe, nurturing environment.

When considering the construction of a major element or structure, it is best to work with a professional firm that has experience in building this type of element and, if possible, experience installing the structure or object in a library or other public facility. There is enormous detail in this type of construction, and it needs to be fully integrated with the overall design of the youth space. Professional companies produce detailed plans that lead to the successful implementation of the idea.

Denelle Wrightson elaborated on this theme as she told us about building the garden area in the children's room at Schaumburg Township District Library. They subcontracted to Chicago Design, people who could take a sketch and turn it into reality.

If you are doing it in a vacuum, fine. But to integrate into our building, we needed to know the exact dimensions and the heights of the tree so we could make sure the lighting was right and change the ceiling and work with the flooring and exactly where one would end and the other would start. Yes, those details were like pulling teeth out of them. One of the lessons I learned, as our firm moved forward and tried to do things in other libraries, was that we took the drawings so far and then, depending on the project and the size of it, brought those drawings to a subconsultant who would detail the drawings and build it under the contractor so that there was coordination.

## PERMANENCE AND TIMELESSNESS

Because redesigning or building new space is a major investment by the community, it is important for the design team to include timelessness in the equation when selecting elements, particularly more permanent elements such as furniture, carpeting, and colors. It is best to avoid anything trendy or easily outdated. Whatever is done needs to last a while, be pleasant and flexible, and should not be exaggerated. Remember, walls can be repainted with relative ease and often, but carpets and furnishings are with the library for years. For example, the vibrant colors in the teen space in the Rockwall County Library (see plate 19) could be easily modified to represent a future color trend.

Be wary of allowing materials into the design that have permanent colors that are part of a current color trend, including surfaces that cannot be repainted or inexpensively replaced such as plastic laminate, hard-surface resins for countertops, pre-painted light fixtures, and permanent signage. The fashion and mercantile design industry sets color trends *each year*. General trends may last several years, but it behooves retailers for products to become quickly outdated. Although it is customary in the hospitality industry to change color schemes and update interior environments every five to seven years, few if any libraries can justify or afford to do this. Therefore, the interior designer is expected to be sensitive and sensible when it comes to selecting finish materials and colors with timelessness in mind. This does not mean, however, that it is necessary to engage in a *timeless* fanaticism that results in drab and boring environments.

Timelessness can also be in the eye of the beholder. No matter how diligent we are in striving for “timeless” design, color and stylistic trends abound in the products available at any given time. It is worthwhile to look at an existing space without prejudice to a particular fad or trend of the past. For example, many libraries built in the 1970s integrated orange plastic laminates or gold end panels. Often in renovations, staff and community develop a dislike for such “trendy” elements of a past generation. Yet in many instances these very elements are part of a cohesive design language and can be cleverly integrated within a renovated space.

For example, clear anodized aluminum storefronts were extremely popular in the 1960s and '70s. In the 1980s, powder-coated (painted) finishes from the factory became available. Buildings from the 1980s to the present therefore include a broad array of painted metal window and door frames in colors from pink to red to aquamarine. Though the color preference of a prior generation may not be the current preference, it is important to consider incorporating these elements into a renovation rather than replacing (which is costly) or recoating (which is futile in most cases). Clear anodized window frames can be cleaned and will last for another generation. Many also accommodate reglazing (new windowpanes) for thermal efficiency.

## FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is a critical element in designing space for youth. Libraries planned now must be able to accommodate the unknown technology, programming, staff needs, and materials of the future. In our interview, Jeff Scherer commented on the need for flexibility:

What is really interesting about children's areas is that you cannot define the task in advance like you can in all the other departments in the library. So, where people get into trouble, at least from my experience, is when they try too hard to define the task in advance. And what I find are the most successful children's programs or areas are those that understand the structure of how children learn, but don't try to box them in. [The design] allows for the space to evolve and change fairly rapid over time, [particularly] if you have the right financial, service, and staffing understanding of how that change has to happen. Too often the spaces are way too limiting for that kind of spontaneity to occur.

School-age and teen areas need to be particularly flexible. Activities and needs are driving factors in how the space is used at any one time or for any one purpose. Moving furniture to accommodate activities is a favorite pastime, and it is not so unusual for groupings of peers or activities to require different seating and table configurations. The summary of a 2008 LAMA presentation on top building trends noted that new buildings need to focus on function, not form. Open spaces with reconfigurable furniture and materials, furniture and shelving on wheels, easy setup and breakdown of room arrangements, and the flexibility of a space to be used for more than one purpose are the goals for the modern library (Camarata 2008, 2).

Jeff Scherer continued:

Within a given twelve-month period you can have one child move from one kind of sedentary activity to a very active area or vice versa. And then you get up in the upper ten- to twelve-year-olds and you start getting very precocious kids, kids that are moving up into adult collections very fast or who also want to move back. So, what we have been trying to do is focus on or rethink how to program library space for teens. . . . We have been doing what we call "place mapping," and what that is is trying to break down activities into a three-dimensional grid. You have some activities along one side and other activities on the other side—and trying to show the community that where these two points intersect is not a fixed thing. It's continually evolving. And it changes the amount of space that's needed for different activities; it's going to change depending on the rhythm of the day or the year. So if it's after 3 o'clock, it's one size bubble. If it's before 3 o'clock, it's a different size bubble. If it's June, it's different than it is a week before finals.

The most important part of the design in regard to flexibility is the structure of the building. To achieve flexibility, it is best for the architect and structural engineer to coordinate the building plans and space design from the concept phase. For instance, in one-story buildings there is no need for repetitive structural bays. It is critical that the design team keep the space as free of structural columns (and bearing walls) as possible. In the Horsham Township Library, the architect/structural team was able to create a space of 10,800 square feet without columns. Columns are considered impediments to flexibility and sight lines. Although they are structurally necessary, their arrangement, spacing, and sizing can all be managed and controlled by the design team. Many libraries suffer severe inefficiencies because columns were integrated by the architect as "decorative or space-defining" elements.

Be sure to know the architectural symbol for columns on floor plans. During the October 2000 Association for Library Service to Children/American Library Trustee

The children's and young adults' library design stage [at the Santiago Public Library in Chile] was very intense and had the intervention of multiple agents. Work was focused in three directions—architecture, design, and community.

The building in which the library [was constructed] was formerly a state warehouse. Although a building of such characteristics might be thought to allow plenty of flexibility due to its sizeable halls in open levels, the renovation was limited to the already existing spaces. It was then suggested that the library should be designed in direct relation to the user—the human being—not only taking into account the activities and functions proper to a library, which are constantly changing. In this sense, the means, rooms, and spaces, and the activities and areas of the building should be able to be modified. The library should be constructed bearing in mind possible and future uses, human as well as technological growth and development.

This is particularly important when considering an infant and juvenile library. The shapes, materials, and the relationships people used to have with children and young adults are not the same ones that existed thirty years ago. And thus it is easily predictable these will not be the same in the next thirty years. The protagonist role children and young adults have today in a country's undertaking and political decision making; the level of participation they have in school, family, or city; the incorporation of an important and massive number of technological advances; the transformations in the educational and cultural national planning scheme—all must be considered at the moment of designing and building of such features.

The interior design has to consider potential transformations. Nothing should be static; everything should be potentially malleable. Graphic and industrial designers had to consider suitable furniture, signage, and color. Infant and juvenile libraries must be developed in such a way that children and young adults can find the information arranged according to the topic instead of books organized by numeric and alphabetical codes.

Most of the library users belong to the poorest areas of the city. In their small and generally overpopulated houses, it is unlikely to have adequate spaces for comfortable study or leisure activities. Then, the library must be a comfortable and cozy space, an expansion of home—a place they feel is their own.

—Gonzalo Oyarzun (2009)

Association's National Institute "Up the Leadership Ladder" seminar in Baltimore, a librarian noted that she had been shocked, after the completion of her building, that what she thought were round tables on the floor plan were in fact large round columns—and there were many in the space. Not only was she shortchanged in table quantity, but the sight lines and flexibility of the space were seriously compromised. Architectural and engineering drawings are complicated and contain many symbols that library professionals are not necessarily trained to read. It is imperative to ask questions of the architects and engineers and not make assumptions. If something on the drawing does not look right, chances are that it may not be right or what you expect.

Walls and columns are not easily movable, but it is important to keep flexibility in mind when selecting furniture, shelving, and carpeting. It may be helpful to standardize some things—meeting room chairs, computer furniture, shelving—throughout the library or an entire branch system to increase the possibility for moving things around easily from room to room or from branch to branch depending on need. Carpet tiles rather than broadloom may be easier to keep clean and fresh and can be replaced more easily.

Other things to keep in mind that provide for a flexible environment include shelving on casters, sled-based chairs, a multitude of electrical receptacles distributed throughout the room, light fixtures designed for task flexibility, modular acoustical partitions and sound-dampening materials, and minimal fixed walls and features. Architect Lou Khan, highly regarded for attention to detail, commented on his plans for the Kimball Museum of Art in Fort Worth: "I don't like to see space nailed down. If you could move it and change it every day, fine" (1978, 47).

## ELIMINATION OF CLUTTER

Libraries are the most accessible public buildings on earth and often are architectural masterpieces—landmarks in the community. Conscientious library administrators, diligent in maintaining the integrity of the space, help customers realize the full benefit of the library experience. The Richland County (S.C.) Public

Library system is one that has beautifully maintained buildings—free of clutter and providing services second to none—all of these things combining to earn a *Library Journal* “Library of the Year” distinction in 2001.

Yet many libraries struggle to create and maintain the dignity of a clutter-free environment. The situation is exacerbated by well-intended customers who deposit all of their old or unused books and other items right at the front door of the library. Although these gifts may be welcomed for Friends’ book sales, they nevertheless take space and add to the clutter, especially of small, storage-strapped buildings. Libraries are often cousins to attics and basements. Old furniture, lamps, and decorations wind their way to the public library from both customers and staff. Susan Kent summed it up: “Public Libraries are the only public spaces—except parks—that are completely accessible to all sectors of the public with no constraints” (2005).

Youth services librarians are particularly prone to creating, saving, and reusing programming materials as well as displaying an inordinate number of fliers and brochures on the low stacks generally available in children’s spaces. Similar to teachers, children’s librarians collect items that are used in storytime and reading clubs. Props, signage, and decorations are often created by staff and young patrons as part of an activity session. During the design phase of the project, it is important to recognize these activities and provide adequate storage and display areas for the materials.

Though it is wonderful that libraries have an overarching mission to be completely accessible, this is also a liability when it comes to tidiness and clutter. And make no mistake—a clutter-free, attractive environment is as important to the success of the library as it is to any retail store. Keeping clear lines of sight, understandable pathways, and intelligible signage are all part of the success of any retail business; so too for libraries. Keep in mind that the library is not a domicile for staff and frequent customers. It should not be papered with personal photographs and temporary signs. Personal belongings and furnishings should stay at home. Who wants to come to a library that looks like an overflowing attic?

If the governing agency has a policy for excess furniture and equipment, make it a priority to discard the items quickly following procedural guidelines. Everything from old computers and fax machines to broken chairs and old card catalogs clutters libraries everywhere. Storing these items is wasteful, since they are taking up expensive square footage that could be used for other productive purposes, even if in the basement. The easiest way to manage clutter is to establish a policy and enforce it consistently, removing most of the personal anguish from keeping the library beautiful, tidy, and welcoming.

## CONCLUSION

The library is an amazing place, and the resources it provides are invaluable for many young people. The goal of most modern libraries is to create an inviting environment—one that conveys that children and teens are welcome. Whether the goal is to “Wow” children and families, to entice teens with trendy decor, or simply to provide a clean, pleasant place to begin lifelong learning, design is instrumental in achieving the vision. Clarifying the vision of how the space will convey welcome and determining

how the priorities of the community are to be reflected in the building or space design are goals of the design process.

How children and teens react to and interact with the new space is initiated in the design team's willingness to explore their own imaginative thought processes as well as others', particularly teens. The functioning of the library and the ease of use by patrons are results of the design team's focus on flexible and interactive environments and the selection of materials based on thoughtful consideration for permanence in relationship to the design. Allowing the architect to think out of the box in creating a new library—one that has a balanced consideration for function—ultimately results in a dynamic, well-planned library.