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Censorship
throughout the
Centuries p. 28

NEWSMAKER:
Ada Limón p. 16

PLUS: ALA Awards,
Ghost-Hunting Kits,
AR in Academia

2024

LIBRARY
DESIGN
SHOWCASE

p. 18



2024 LIBRARY DESIGN SHOWCASE

BY Phil Morehart

Welcome to the 2024 Library Design Showcase, *American Libraries'* annual celebration of new and renovated libraries throughout North America. Like the profession itself, library facilities are in a constant state of rebirth and reimagination. Libraries have evolved from places devoted strictly to scholarship and materials collection to true *third spaces*, where diverse communities come together to congregate, learn, and grow while also honoring local history and the environment. This year's showcase selections deserve to be celebrated as prime examples of this progress. **AL**

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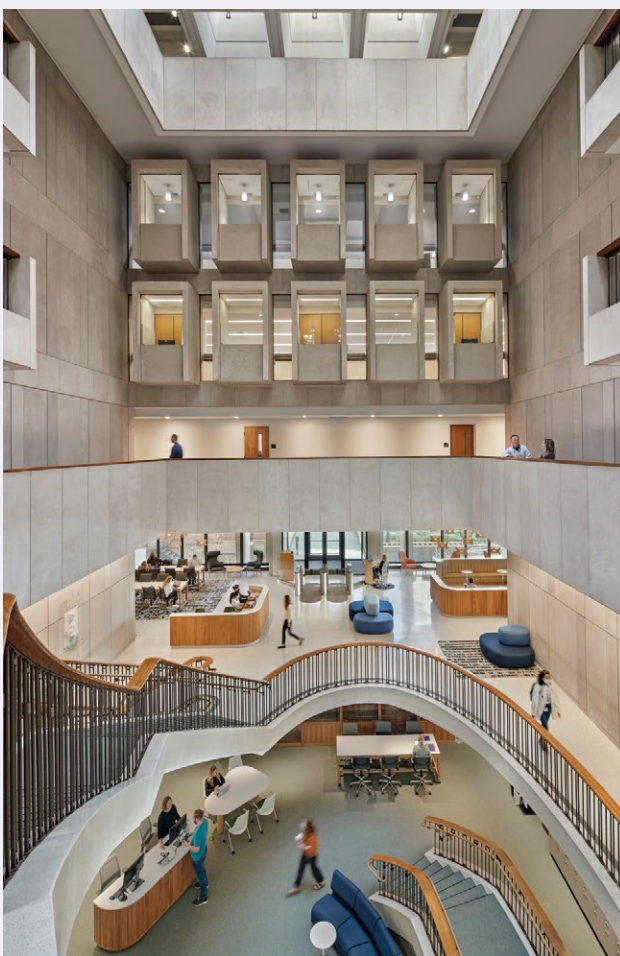




FROM BRUTAL TO BEAUTIFUL

◀ Toronto Public Library, York Woods branch

The York Woods renovation and addition retains the original 1970 brutalist library and connected theater while enhancing them with a new 2,000-square-foot glass entrance pavilion, topped with a timber roof to create a welcoming entryway. The interior retains the original structure but now incorporates exposed concrete beams softened with wood and vibrant acoustic panels. A new two-story transparent atrium and amphitheater staircase opens the space, improves orientation, and creates a safe, accessible environment for users. For local youth, the library also has an updated early literacy center, a teen section with a kitchenette and adaptable furniture, and—in anticipation of plans to establish a music school on the property—a new instrument-lending library. **PROJECT TYPE:** Renovation and expansion **ARCHITECT:** Diamond Schmitt **SIZE:** 41,000 square feet **COST:** \$11 million Canadian (\$8 million US) **PHOTO:** Lisa Logan Photography



◀ Harvard Medical School, The Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine in Boston

This reinvigoration of interiors and services transformed an insular, unwelcoming brutalist limestone building from 1965 into a dynamic learning facility. The final phase of this project was completed in July 2023, with work done in phases starting in 2019 while the library remained open. The first floor now serves as the center of library activity, with collaborative seating areas, a café, a campus store, and a versatile event space. Circulation relocated to the lower level, while quiet study zones were moved to the upper level to enhance focus. The interior design, now configured to optimize access to natural light, introduces curved forms, organic and reflective textures, and biophilic motifs that infuse the library with warmth. **PROJECT TYPE:** Renovation **ARCHITECT:** Shepley Bulfinch **SIZE:** 42,407 square feet **COST:** \$17 million **PHOTO:** Robert Benson

RESTORATION RENOVATION

◀ Brown County (Wis.) Library, East branch

The East Branch Project was an ingenious renovation project that transformed an old health club—complete with a swimming pool that had to be filled in—into a modern, attractive library. The design included adding a drive-up window, multiple study rooms, a divisible meeting room, a wellness and calming room, seating next to an enclosed fireplace, and the

conversion of an adjacent empty lot into an enclosed garden space. Historic maps and images from the library's archives have been used as murals throughout the building, enhancing its connection to the community. **PROJECT TYPE:** Renovation **ARCHITECT:** Somerville Architects and Engineers **SIZE:** 16,400 square feet **COST:** \$6.3 million **PHOTO:** Gary Parker Photography

FUTURISTIC VISIONS

► Lexington (Ky.) Public Library, Marksbury Family branch

The new facility addresses critical needs in one of Lexington's most diverse communities by offering spots for gathering and creative expression. Maximizing limited outdoor space, the branch's exterior entryway includes seating designed into the hardscape that extends into the interior, creating a fluid transition between inside and outside. The cornerstone of the facility is its first-floor paseo: a spacious, multifunctional area that encourages meetups and civic activity. Extending off the paseo are meeting spaces and makerspaces. Natural light floods the central atrium, enhancing the vibrant atmosphere. **PROJECT TYPE:** New construction **ARCHITECT:** EOP Architects/Group 4 Architecture, Research + Planning **SIZE:** 30,000 square feet **COST:** \$17.4 million **PHOTO:** JL Jordan Photography

▼ Grimes (Iowa) Public Library

An airy, two-story lobby with open stairs beneath a prairie-inspired sculpture greets visitors as they step inside the new Grimes Public Library. The rest of the first floor includes a children's collection and play area, youth program room, sensory room, coffee bar, community meeting rooms, public art gallery, and staff spaces. A mezzanine for teens overlooks the children's section, providing young patrons with spaces, collections, and technology to call their own. The second floor houses the adult collection, which includes a lounge and homey fireplace. The exterior palette of brick, split-face limestone, black-metal panels, and wooden soffits carry into the interior to add warmth and texture. All textures and joint patterns throughout the building were oriented vertically and at a



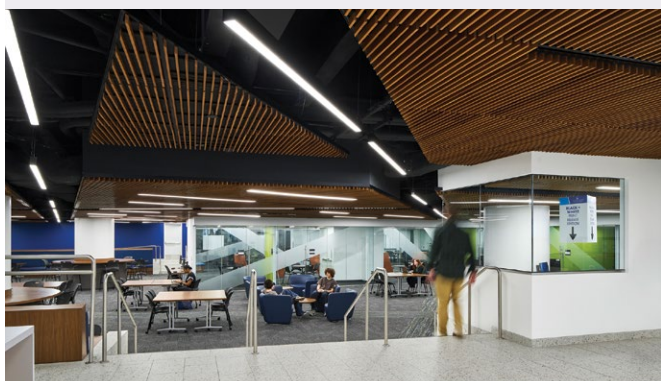
random pattern to emulate books sitting on shelves. **PROJECT TYPE:** New construction **ARCHITECT:** INVISION **SIZE:** 22,300 square feet **COST:** \$11.8 million **PHOTO:** Cameron Campbell/Integrated Studio



ADVANCEMENTS IN ACADEMICS

▼ Georgia State University, North Library Study Commons in Atlanta

For this innovative renovation and expansion project, Georgia State University converted a parking area beneath one of its main library buildings into a 19,000-square-foot, student-focused Study Commons. The Study Commons, which added more than 200 seats to the library, includes four gender-neutral, single-user restrooms; a wellness room for nursing mothers; group study and meeting rooms of various sizes; a quiet study room; and a student-operated café. Open until 2 a.m. most days of the week, the Study Commons provides an ideal location for late-night learning after the rest of the facility closes. **PROJECT TYPE:** Renovation and expansion **ARCHITECT:** PRAXIS3 **SIZE:** 19,000 square feet **COST:** \$8.2 million **PHOTO:** McGinn Photography



▲ Indiana University Bloomington, Education Library

Serving Indiana University's School of Education, this once-in-a-generation renovation breathed new life into a space that hadn't been updated since it opened over three decades ago. Once, the facility mostly comprised rows of tall bookshelves holding legacy microfiche and print collections, including bound journals and dissertations, that no longer reflect the needs of today's students. The library is now a more open, comfortable setting for them to gather and learn. The transformation introduced WORKshop, a simulated classroom that offers teachers-in-training a more realistic setting in which to practice their skills. It also added dozens of new study spaces, including several private rooms and a book discussion area with a long U-shaped sofa that encourages collaboration. Future educators can also take advantage of expanded access to the library's children's literature collections, including a Social Justice Book Gallery. **PROJECT TYPE:** Renovation **ARCHITECT:** Fanning Howey **SIZE:** 19,000 square feet **COST:** \$2.1 million **PHOTO:** Natalie Norton

RED-HOT KIDS ZONE

► Calgary (Alberta) Public Library, Fish Creek branch

As part of an extensive building-wide renovation, this branch revamped its second-floor children's area with the addition of Engine 23, a donated, decommissioned fire engine. Previously installed in the former Central Library, the 20-ton engine moved to storage when that building closed in 2018. Now at Fish Creek, it's the cornerstone of an immersive playing and learning experience for children and families, providing a hands-on approach to literacy skill-building and safety education. Young patrons can get behind the wheel, fiddle with switches and levers, dress up in fire gear, play with an interactive map, and enjoy storytimes with local firefighters. An accessible cab gives children and parents who can't access the



fire engine a way to engage in the experience. **PROJECT TYPE:** Renovation **ARCHITECT:** BRZ Partnership Architecture Inc., Carswell Consulting Engineers, and F&D Scene Changes **SIZE:** 50,231 square feet **COST:** \$4 million Canadian (\$2.9 million US) **PHOTO:** Calgary Public Library



CREATING SPACE FOR EVERYONE

▲ Meridian (Idaho) Library District, Orchard Park branch

Using community input and data gathered from focus groups, MSR Design created a library focused on removing barriers to access and expanding all-inclusive services and programs, especially for neurodivergent patrons. The Orchard Park branch's layout goes beyond merely providing a dedicated sensory space. Rather, it creates a holistic experience that's

mindful of sound, durability, lighting, and an extension of tactile surfaces, especially in the children's sections. While there, young patrons can play with touch-sensitive light panels, run their hands through illuminated strands of light, and build their own play area using large blocks, tubes, and other shapes. **PROJECT TYPE:** New construction **ARCHITECTS:** MSR Design (interior)/CSHQA Inc. (exterior) **SIZE:** 16,218 square feet **COST:** \$3.8 million **PHOTO:** Farm Kid Studios



AT ONE WITH NATURE

◀ Oregon (Wis.) Public Library

In order to expand, the library of this quaint, southern Wisconsin village moved out of downtown and now sits adjacent to the Keller Alpine Meadows and Lerner Conservation parks. The design embraces these natural surroundings, with windows on every floor that provide sweeping views of the parks and flood the library with light, creating a peaceful, bright ambience. Indoor and outdoor learning spaces support the community and integrate the facility into the landscape. A path between the library and conservation park connects to a walking and bike trail and serves as a StoryWalk featuring picture books. Native plants, grasses, and trees are part of prairie restoration plans for the site. Additionally, the library is equipped with solar panels, efficient windows and lighting, water-conserving plumbing fixtures, and a geothermal system. **PROJECT TYPE:** New construction **ARCHITECT:** OPN Architects **SIZE:** 31,257 square feet **COST:** \$12.4 million **PHOTO:** Alex Michl/OPN Architects

FORM AND FUNCTION BEHIND THE SCENES

▼ Multnomah County (Ore.) Library Operations Center in Portland

The new Operations Center is the beating heart of Multnomah County Library. It's where new books and collections come into the system and hold items are sorted and transferred. There's space for 500,000 library materials and more than 60,000 linear feet of specialized outreach materials, with which the system supports patrons in new immigrant communities, schools, retirement communities, shelters, and other settings. It also uses automated materials handling technology that gets library items to patrons efficiently while making library staffers available for public-facing customer service. The renovated former Safeway building also has more than 600 photovoltaic roof panels and is designed to achieve net-zero energy use. Most of the building is not open to the public, except for Rose City Reads, a storefront operated by the Friends of Multnomah County Library that sells weeded library books, donated books, and other merchandise. **PROJECT TYPE:** New construction/renovation **ARCHITECT:** Hennebery Eddy Architects **SIZE:** 73,000 square feet **COST:** \$56.6 million **PHOTO:** Bob Kerns Photography



HISTORIC FACELIFT

▲ Hotchkiss Library of Sharon, Connecticut

Built in 1893, Hotchkiss Library was a gift to the town of Sharon by educator, philanthropist, and heiress Maria Bissell Hotchkiss in memory of her late husband; it lies within the Sharon Historical District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The library's restoration and expansion honor its rich history while bringing it into the 21st century with updated spaces, technology, accessibility, and energy efficiency. The architects chose complementary materials and forms—such as the masonry arch over the new entrance, the new roof pitch, and the fascia and soffit—to echo the existing architecture. Custom wall sconces were installed around the mezzanine to replicate fixtures that appear in an antique photograph of the library. Great care was taken to not over-restore; to create a lived-in patina, the woodwork was cleaned and oiled but not stripped and refinished. **PROJECT TYPE:** Renovation and expansion **ARCHITECT:** QA+M Architecture **SIZE:** 6,600 square feet **COST:** \$2.8 million **PHOTO:** Jake Snyder, Red Skies Photography

