“The character and contents of an institution manifests itself through its buildings” wrote Norwegian National Librarian Vidgís Moe Skarstein on the occasion of the opening of the renovated National Library building in Oslo during the August 2005 IFLA conference. In this interview the National Librarian and the architect discuss the challenges and considerations of the renovation that made the monumental building from 1913 into a National Library for the 21st century.

Architect Rolf Erik Wahlstrøm and his colleagues at OKSÅW AS faced a major challenge when they were given the task of renovating the monumental building that was originally built in 1913. At first it was opened as the Oslo University Library with a “Norwegian Department” to which was assigned the national library functions. When, 20 years later, the building was to be reshaped into a National Library for the digital age, the original infrastructure posed a major problem, says the architect. The building was very poor in terms of light, and the original decorations were removed and adapted for use in other buildings, and the floors were not adapted for the number of employees and the services required by a modern National Library. In order to ensure effective storage of printed materials, the original stacks had extremely low heights between the Roats. Accordingly, some areas were neither suitable as modern visitors’ or office space. At the same time we have a responsibility for – and laws that require – the preservation of the monumental building’s stacks, as seen in buildings like this one, says Rolf Erik Wahlstrøm.

From load-carrying bookshelves to hidden network wiring National Librarian Vidgís Moe Skarstein also sees significant symbolism in the manner in which the original library building was designed. – I find it intriguing that the book shelves in fact functioned as load-carrying elements. Although the purpose naturally was to hold in stock, the cold, completed within budget and on time. We achieved these goals in addition to revamping and reengineering virtually all of the library’s work processes and technology infrastructure—all by opening day.

Dear Colleagues, Once again the IFLA WC will soon be upon us and the open session of the section for Library Buildings and Design will be scheduled for Tuesday 22nd August from 12.45 – 15.45 and will be held in cooperation with the Metropolitan Libraries Section under the title “Renovating and renewing libraries: the wow factor”. This year we will focus on how architects and librarians can work with existing buildings to create new library spaces and produce the “wow factor”. The session will bring together 4 speakers from around the globe, including the well known Canadian architect, John Paratou, who has worked on a number of Library projects including the Bibliotheca nationale du Quebec in Montreal. The session will end with a panel debate and the opportunity to discuss various issues around library design and architecture with our four speakers.

Even if we live in the digital age I am struck by how much emphasis is being placed on library buildings and design in recent years. Books on library architecture are certainly an important part of US publications; this year the Danish Library Association published a wonderful book entitled “Bibliotekers rum”, which literally translated means the library room or space. This publication is intended to give inspiration to those involved in the design process of a Library – librarians, architects, local politicians.

Open landscapes The challenge for both the architect and the employer was to preserve an original library building at the same time adapting it for good, modern places of work, satisfying high demands on a digital infrastructure and a modern visitor space.

The Norwegian National Library : A house of contrast

Rolf Erik Wahlstrøm

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Design og layout

Jakob Poulsen, Slagelse County Library, Denmark

Name of library: Fayetteville Public Library (Building name is Blair Library)

Location (city / state / country): Fayetteville, Arkansas USA

Year completed: Opened in October 2004; final completion spring 2006

Gross building area: 88,754 square feet (+87,929 square foot parking garage)

Planned collection capacity (books, nonprint, other): 300,000 items

Number of computer stations for library users: 100

Number of reader seats: 317 (+36 outdoor seats)

Other key design features: Fireplace room named for Roberta Fulbright, business woman, journalist and mother of Senator J. William Fulbright; large outdoor terrace overlooking mountains; indoor / outdoor cafe; U.S. Green Building Council

In the Netherlands there is also a lot of interest in this subject and the Dutch Library Association has recently published “New Library Buildings in the Netherlands 4” with a special emphasis on the design of children’s libraries. There is no doubt that this area which has often, until recently, not received the focus that it needs and deserves. Too many examples of children’s libraries are out of touch with the times we live in and often reflect a very traditional understanding of how children use libraries and other cultural institutions. This is why we have decided that the main focus of our session for IFLA 2009 in Milan will be new design concepts for children’s libraries.

We look forward to seeing you in Quebec.

The publications mentioned can be ordered from: Biblioteksrummet (DB) – http://www.dbf.dk/Default.aspx?id=4227


http://www.nb.no/english/facts

http://www.nlb.no/english/facts
Three parts of the process were the most strenuous. First, during the site selection and early design phase we held dozens of public meetings each day and night. That’s when we encountered citizens who were resistant to change, didn’t understand the need for tripling the size of the library, or used their belief in the need for the library to justify opposition as a reason to oppose the project. The challenge here was to create a structure for the community conversation, get acceptance of a set of ground rules for each meeting, welcome and be open to all comments, seek to understand and respond to the meaning behind the words and educate, educate, educate.

Second, impenetrable rock was encountered during the site excavation that threatened to use up all our contingency funds. This was partially resolved through the use of blasting something we had told neighbors of the new library that we would not do. It took a lot of community relations building, something we had told neighbors of the new library that we would not do. Finally, the six months prior to moving into the new library and the twelve months following the opening were exhausting. One challenge was to resolve all outstanding construction issues without having the taxpayers bear the cost. For instance, the finish on the cork flooring was not acceptable to the library. Because at the start of the construction the stakeholders had pledged to be respectful, work as a team and value each other throughout the entire process, the groundwork had been laid for a productive conversation that resulted in a solution that met our needs and was paid for by the parties responsible. The values have to be articulated right at the start. Everyone has to buy in and live them because it’s a long process.

Based on the building’s use, what design element(s) would you change? I would enlarge the main meeting room by at least thirty percent to 300 person capacity plus double the size of the meeting room kitchen and chair storage. I would double the size of the young adult area and double the number of PCs in that area. And, finally, I would decrease the size of the circulation desk by 50% because 70% of all items are now being self-checked.

How has the community responded? The new library has been overwhelmingly received by the community. This is reflected in the continued double digit increases in use and positive media attention. It is considered a “crown jewel” of the community. Residents regularly bring out-of-town visitors to show off our library. Local businesses and institutions show off the library to potential job recruits; libraries from around the country come to tour and the library is regularly featured in local economic development marketing materials and videos. Fayetteville Public Library’s Blair Library has opened the community’s eyes to what a library can and should be.

Building for the Future

By: Karen Løftinger

The IFLA Library Buildings & Equipment Section and the Koninklijke Bibliotheek held a joint conference, Building for the Future: National and Academic Libraries from around the Globe, in The Hague from the 3rd – 5th October 2007. The conference was attended by some 80 participants from Europe and beyond and combined visits and lectures as well as providing the opportunity to network and share experiences. The conference opened with visits to the University Library at Delft designed by Mecanoo and to Michael Wilford’s Peace Palace in The Hague. Both buildings are architecturally striking and successful working libraries and both visit gave rise to much discussion and diverse opinion.

The first session on the Thursday morning covered national libraries and included presentations on the dramatic Black Diamond – the Royal Library Copenhagen, Denmark, the National Library of Belarus, the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago, and the National Library of Korea. The afternoon session celebrated 25 years of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) building and included a fascinating account by Martin Bas senbroek of the rearranging of the public area. Sjoerd Koop man, Coordinator of Professional Activities at IFLA, paid tribute to the sustained support of the KB for IFLA over the years and presented a copy of a book celebrating the 25th anniversary of the building to Martin Bas senbroek. Karen Løftinger gave a presentation on the IFLA Library Building Guidelines which had been launched at the IFLA Beijing conference. On Friday the focus shifted to academic and research libraries. The keynote paper by Tanja Notten described the University Library of Utrecht designed by Wiel Arets at a cost of 45 million euros and opened in 2004. The need for more space and central facilities and safety and environmental conditions prompted the drive for a new building. The vision for the new library was to integrate service points, allow access to as much of the collections as possible and provide a mixture of individual and group study spaces. Lounge, café and auditorium spaces were provided in addition to traditional studying and reading areas. Flexibility in both the structure and house rules was key to the project in order to create a welcoming atmosphere while still maintaining a balance between the scholarly and the social. Work spaces were designed to allow two-way communication between staff and users. The décor, including black walls and intricate glazing patterns, was intended to create intimacy and encourage concentration. Celia Lacerda then presented a paper on the Library at Unicamp on Curitiba in Brazil. This building sits in a beautifully landscaped site overlooking a lake at a central point of the campus. It is a dramatic trapezoidal shaped building of 8 floors with an atrium. It was designed by Manoel Coelho and it was evident that there had been excellent rapport between the architectural and library teams. Alternating mezzanines, broad stairways and a panoramic lift add to the drama of the building which is also a very practical, environmentally-conscious one. Wide glass panels allow natural lighting and ventilation and the building relates well to its natural setting. Internet access and a mixture of seating areas take precedence over collection space in acknowledgement of the current trend of access to information being more important than possession.

The third paper addressed the issue of commissioning a building and the planning process as the building itself (the new library for Aberdeen University in the north of Scotland) has not yet been built. Wendy Pike set the new library in its context and discussed the vision for the building. As well as requiring a functional and environmentally-friendly but iconic building, the University wants to integrate collections and offer an enhanced service to the local community. The importance of having a clear vision for the future rather than just duplicating the existing set-up was stressed as was the need for good architectural advice from the very beginning and a clear Collection Management Policy. An architectural competition was launched in 2005 and 6 practices, from the 100 expressions of interest, were short-listed. The winners announced in 2005 were Danish architects - Schmidt Hammer Lassen. It is hoped to start the £84.5m project in 2008/09 with a proposed completion date of 2011/12.

The final presentation of the conference was given by Ruth Pagell on the Li Ka Shing Library at Singapore Management University. She stressed the importance of the library as holding a central and critical place in the learning environment. As well as being open, friendly and flexible, it had to embody the highest aesthetic and environmental values to encourage scholarship and learning. The physical library is where space, appropriate pedagogy and technology overlap; an innovative institution needs an exciting and well-designed library which should be a link between the classroom and the workplace. The speaker looked at the impact of research and teaching services on the design of the building; growing e-resources means there is less need for shelving areas and also has an impact on work and reading areas and the interface between library staff and users. A recurrent theme was the need for more evidence-based research, to find out how libraries are used and what our users want. This can then feed into the design and choice of furniture. The conference more than fulfilled its promise to look at how national and academic libraries have risen to the challenges posed by changes in service provision and ever-growing expectations from users.