

The Norwegian National Library : A house of contrast

by: Tone Grave, Director Strategic Marketing and communications, The Norwegian national Library

"The character and contents of an institution manifests itself through its buildings" wrote Norwegian National Librarian Vigdis 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 ØKAW 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, 100 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 itself was partially a set of stacks, and 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 floors. 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 Norwegian cultural heritage, as seen in buildings like this one, says Rolf Erik Wahlstrøm.

From load-carrying bookshelves to hidden network wiring

National Librarian Vigdis 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 save space, it is significant that the collection kept the building standing. This we want to preserve – mainly in a symbolic sense into the digital age. But we also chose to keep some of the original shelves and the low ceilings in some places, in order to show how this was done in the near past. But at the same time, the building was to be the setting for a National Library for the 21st century. Thus, it is quite symbolic that we have miles and miles of network cables hidden in order to supply our users with digital experiences, both inside and outside the old building. We wanted to mirror the contrast and the wealth of the collection, both in content and formats, through the newly renovated building. Alongside our rooms in Mo i Rana under the Arctic Circle and on the Internet, it makes up the space of the Norwegian National Library. To me the combination of authentic architecture, decorations and interiors with more modern elements makes for a nice image of preserving the past by making it alive and interesting today, says National Librarian Vigdis Moe Skarstein.

Open landscapes

The challenge for both the architect and the employer was to preserve an antiquated building while at the same time adapting it for good, modern places of work, satisfying high demands on a digital infrastructure and a modern visitor space. In addition to the demands from the new management for larger, better and more accessible public areas than had previously been the case, modern demands for fire safety for both personnel and materials posed great challenges, says the architect.

In the quest for good solutions the architects chose to combine two and two floors into one in order to free up vertical space. In reality, the new National Library has less floor space within the same volume as before.

This is why we agreed to establish work places in open landscapes that made it easier to exploit the area through smaller landscape groups., the architect explains. – This also supports the strategic goals of the National Library, the National Librarian explains. It is our goal to be a modern national library. In order to achieve this, we need to be an organization able and willing to change, adjusting our efforts to the challenges we face at any given time. I believe openness and good communication skills will be necessary in order to achieve this. My personal experience after 2.5 years in an open landscape is that it facilitates communication with colleagues, says the National Librarian.

"The Half Brother"

In order to replace the stack space that was "lost" through the vertical combination of floors and the establishment of new public areas, the state property developer Entra Eienendom, as the owner of the building, chose to build an extension behind the wings of the building. The original garden in the back was glass roofed and built in as an atrium with a café for the public and employees. The extension in the back, named "The Half Brother" after the novel by Lars Saaby Christensen following a name competition, was designated a future expansion area for the National Library. Beneath "The Half Brother" there were built underground stacks on four floors. These stacks supplement the National Library's stacks in the mountain vault in Mo i Rana.

Through the use of outside storage space, space was freed up in the monumental building in Oslo, making it possible to utilize this optimally for public areas and work spaces.

Functionality and esthetics

– We worked in the intersection of functionality and esthetics both regarding area design and interior architecture. Our starting point was an antiquarian building and an institution wanting to integrate modern functionality into an historical building, reflects the architect. Because the building had relatively few windows compared to more modern buildings, a lot of glass was used, giving it a more transparent look by transporting façade light through the building. Wahlstrøm is pleased that the OKAW architects were allowed to do the work of fitting out the areas. – It was satisfying to further develop the intention of the building in the interior also, and a pleasure to work with National Librarian Vigdis Moe Skarstein because of her understanding of the interplay between functionality and esthetics, architect Rolf Erik Wahlstrøm concludes.

Read more here about the thinking behind the rehabilitation, the original decorations etc in the booklet published when the building was reopened.
<http://www.nb.no/english/facts>

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Editorial

by: Andrew Cranfield, Chair, Section for Library Buildings and Equipment

Dear Colleagues. Once again the IFLA WC will soon be upon us and the open session of the section for Library Buildings and Equipment is scheduled for Tuesday 12th 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 Patkau, who has worked on a number of library projects including the Bibliotheque national du Quebec in Montreal. The session will end with a panel debate and the opportunity to discuss various issues about 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 LIS publications; this year the Danish Library Association published a wonderful book entitled "Biblioteksrummet", 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.

Featured Building - Fayetteville Public Library

by: Anders Dahlgren

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): 330,000 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 café; 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 is an 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>

New Library Buildings in the Netherlands 4 (VOB) - <http://www.debibliotheken.nl/content.jsp?objectId=11811>

LEED-Silver certified; green roof; cork flooring. Design is structured around an organic theme and the natural elements of earth, air, fire, water.

As you consider the entire planning and construction process, what was the greatest challenge (e.g., securing approval and funding, site selection, working with a difficult consulting librarian) and how was it addressed?

All parts of the planning and construction process were challenging. We set incredibly high standards for the project: (1) a transparent and citizen focused design process; (2) a world class facility; (3) 75% support in a public vote for the tax-based funding; (4) a \$6 million endowment goal for our fundraising campaign (5) paid for in cash, no debt, completed within budget and opened 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.

Three parts of the process were the most strenuous. First, during the site selection and early design phase we held dozens of public input meetings 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 imminent obsolescence of libraries 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, but we did it. We also successfully mediated this oversight with the geotechnical firm. 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 relationship.

What was the greatest design challenge and how was it resolved?

The entrance and lobby sequence was the most challenging. The pre-funding design that was featured on the election ads was not, in the end, the design that was built. The library was to be an important building for our fast growing community of 70,000 people, yet the entrance and the entrance sequence didn't stand up to expectations even though its hillside downtown location held the promise of something really spectacular. After the funding was approved, the architect went back to the "table" and, literally, on the back of a pa-

per napkin (how unsustainable!) resolved the issue.

The result was a strong corner entrance facing toward the historical center of our downtown and a café with seating inside and outside the entrance. Visitors walk in the door and have a sense of "wow." The curvaceous lines of the lobby literally draw you in with stream-like terrazzo flooring anchored by a circle of a welcome desk and, in the distance, a promise of a spectacular view. When Senator Hillary Clinton visited in 2006 to see the building that was named for her late best friend, Diane Blair, she walked through the doors and immediately saw and expressed the "wow" factor.

What feature(s) works particularly well in the building?

One wing of our building ends in a giant ellipse shape that looks out to the mountains. Customers are drawn to these elliptical spaces and seek them out. Another thing we hear from customers is they like the diversity of seating areas there are many different types of seating environments and seek out their favorite niches. Also, the lobby achieved the "grand central station" effect that was desired. There is not enough room here to list all the features that work well.

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 overwhelming 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 in to show off their library; local business 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 Latimer

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 experience. 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 visits 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 Bossenbroek of the rearranging of the public area. Sjoerd Koopman, 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 Bossenbroek. Karen Latimer gave a presentation on the IFLA Library Building Guidelines which had been launched at the IFLA Durban conference. On Friday the focus shifted to academic and research libraries.

The first 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 centralised facilities as well as improved health 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 shelving 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 UnicenP at Curitiba in Brasil. 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 in the building itself (the new library for Aberdeen University in the north of Scotland) has not yet been built. Wendy Pirie 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 08/09 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 had risen to the challenge posed by changes in service provision and ever-growing expectations from users.

