2020

Current: the River City Library

Abigail Fundling
Virginia Commonwealth University

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CURRENT

THE RIVER CITY LIBRARY

Abgail Fundling
MFA | VCUarts Interior Design
Spring 2020
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6.1 Maggie’s West
London Centre
(2008) by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners

DECLARATION

SUSTAINABILITY
Prioritizing the people who use the spaces I design as well as the environments in which these spaces reside. I believe in prioritizing energy efficiency, low, no-impact, and recycled materials, limiting waste, and optimizing the needs of the relationship between the building and its specific natural setting.

CONTEXT
I believe that we do not design for ourselves, but for others, their environment, and their culture. For this reason, I will always design with awareness and be responsive to the unique conditions of the landscape, social circumstances, and culture that surround a project. My designs will always have a sense of place and be evidence-based.

CREATIVITY
As a designer, I believe one should not take themselves too seriously, become prescribed, or allow the fear of risk to prevent them from imagination. I believe each design we make must be original, experimental, and unexpected. We must strive to imagine not only interiors, but experiences. Our work must transform space, relying on continuously expand our knowledge, collaborate, and cross disciplines. We should design on every plane we touch and be as multidimensional as the work we make.

AESTHETIC
As designers, we are tasked with making places. While the aesthetic quality of a design is subjective, I believe the importance of maintaining a standard of aesthetics is not. In the design of environments, it is important to design with confidence, lean in, and commit to creating space through sensory experience. To design something that is timeless can seem unattainable, but to design something that is interesting, immersive, and enjoyable takes only a commitment to an idea.

HUMANITY
As designers, I believe most of all that we must do no harm. We should believe in the projects we work on and be committed to our ethics. We must strive to make a positive impact, not simply minimize the bad. We must always design with respect and hold ourselves to a higher standard of practice. An example of this commitment comes from the firm Rogers Stirk Harbour, which developed a constitution that describes the firm’s culture of collaboration and creativity, lists out the kind of projects that the firm will not take on due to moral objections like military projects and prisons, and an obligation to do charity work.

Design is not a luxury, but rather a responsibility. As designers, we create spaces and the parts of the built environment that people touch; in doing this we have the opportunity to improve the quality of life of those who use these spaces.

In my design practice, I believe it is important to prioritize:

- Prioritizing the people who use the spaces
- Ensuring energy efficiency
- Using low, no-impact, and recycled materials
- Minimizing waste
- Optimizing the relationship between the building and its specific natural setting
- Designing with awareness and responding to unique conditions
- Creating spaces that are original, experimental, and unexpected
- Ensuring our work transforms space
- Maintaining a standard of aesthetics
- Avoiding projects that may be morally objectionable
- Committing to charitable work
“A library is about knowledge... the art of understanding things you don’t already know. It is the most incredible machine to create tolerance.”

RENZO PIANO
MOTIVATION
The motivation for this thesis stems from the desire to design an interior environment that responds to the city in which it resides. When looking at a view of Richmond, its most obvious geographical fact that the James River, which flows through it, but despite the direct relationship, the river is truly not visible or connected to the city. The James River is, to many residents, a source of history, culture, and life. That it is on the edge of the city, but the river is not in the consciousness of the public’s perception. The river is in opposition to the image of a wealthy city, exuding affluence and sophistication. The river is, by and large, invisible and easily forgotten. Standing at the water’s edge, one can see a vast panorama of the city skyline, yet when one stands in Richmond’s downtown, the river is inconspicuous in spite of its rich history, obvious proximity, and valuable public space. In a city, there are few built environments more valuable or demonstrative than public spaces. Of the Seattle Central Library, architect Joshua Prince-Ramus said, “Public libraries are the last vestiges of public space.” Prince-Ramus (2006). They are a source of information and education, having the opportunity to become the primary tool to activate a sense of place for the people. The primary goal in this thesis, the research explores public libraries’ ability to connect people as well as examine the potential of the public space as a tool to connect the city with its river. The library will function as a beacon of information, connection, and engagement, and connect the city to its riverfront.

METHODS
Evidence-based design decisions are grounded in research to achieve the development of this project. Theories of human behavior influence the human-centered design of the interior space. Project and Refuge, defined by theorist Jay Appleton, are a series of studies that explore the feeling of safety and comfort in interior space influenced by the relationship to the outside world. This relationship to the outside world, or connection (project), likely place attachment, a preference based on perceived “image” of a space that is held, and place identity, theory based on the genetics of space, rested in the idea that there are “inherent human characteristics in this identity a place, and that, in effect, these are latent and will structures that do not necessarily exist in a design.” (Original Zonneveld, 2005, p. 5).

Research methods including interviews with librarians, library designers, and surveys of the people that use these public spaces as well as the examination of case studies. The goal of this public library on the river is to create the opportunity for people to do these, to be immersed in the new experience. The use library will function as a beacon of information, engagement, and connection in this city as a whole. The research conducted through these case studies, interviews, and surveys helped define the programming needs of the proposed space, how best to achieve a sense of place, and what defines a twenty-first-century library.

RESULTS
The research conducted for this project revealed that enhancing a relationship between an interior space with its site required the creation of a sense of place and belonging linked to its situational context. The required connection being the city, where people reside, to the views up the river of the James River which is needed to enhance a relationship between a sense of place and belonging. The people want to engage and connect through activities like workshops and group study, the consumption of culture like local food or drink, film, and visual media. Successful interior environments are immersive and are based in human-centric design theory.

REFLECTIONS
The goal of this thesis was to provide a rich multi-sensory library space that is engaging to its user and creates a connection to the community. Adapting an existing warehouse with a history of river industry situates this project between the city and the river, drawing a natural connection between these two forces. The resulting design, used material, and contextual design are rooted in the city’s history, local transportation, and local food or drink consumption. The library’s programming, as well as its striking views on the James River, are situated in a strong connection between the site and the city’s water source and the library’s role as a community anchor.

ABSTRACT
The James River from Rocketts Landing, Richmond, VA
INTRODUCTION

This thesis proposes a new cultural typology of a library as the primary tool to activate a sense of place and public connection with the James River as an important node within the city of Richmond. Richmond's riverfront holds a complicated history of injustices, conquest, commerce, and leisure. Today, it is a place to connect with nature and some business as well as agriculture. Before, it saw the setting for a bustling economy, but also once the home of Native Americans, the place of their displacement, and the traffic and trade of enslaved people. While the site selected for this project does not rest on the exact location of these injustices, it acknowledges the history associated with the river. What appears as a simple body of water is actually a site of much history for the city of Richmond, providing an opportunity for engagement and connection. In 1818, Richmond's upper dock was located near where the Kanawha Canal entered the James River, while the lower deep-water port was originally located at Rocketts Landing (Pool, 2018). Today, an empty warehouse stands between these two ports at Gillie Creek (Pool, 2018). It was constructed in 1939 as part of FDR's New Deal, the former president visiting the site in 1936 to announce the new project (Pool, 2018, pg. 7). It was called the Intermediate Terminal Warehouse #3 and facilitated the import of Cuban sugar, peanuts, tobacco, sand, gravel, newsprint, gas, and oil (Pool, 2018). A mile and a half south-east of downtown, the vacant warehouse still stands today, rising high on piers to avoid flooding, its reinforced concrete structure empty but foreboding, a witness of the city's history of river industry. This once commercial site offers an opportunity for re-purposing part of a historical waterfront, as well as its access to road, rail, and bus lines, make it an ideal candidate for public space, contextual reference, and respite from the bustle of the city.

There is a significant precedent for once-opulent cities turning away from their rivers during economic changes and then, in time, rediscovering their waterfronts with a great deal of positive impact. These waterways provide opportunities for community connection and identity in their cities as well as moments of calm and enjoyment. Research repeatedly shows the power of libraries as agents for community engagement (American Library Association, 2018). This research supports the design objective of using public space in the form of a library as an opportunity to enhance a city's relationship with its river through site-specific design, creating an environment for learning and engagement.

RESEARCH STATEMENT

A public library's interior design will enhance the connection between a city and its urban river.

LITERATURE REVIEW
In a city, there are no built environments more valuable or democratic than its public spaces, chief among these are its public libraries. These institutions have become one of the last vestiges of truly public space in the twenty-first century (Prince Ramus, 2009). Unprejudiced, democratic, and egalitarian, libraries freely provide information and accessibility to all, as public, locally-anchored spaces, they have the potential to be touchstones for communities.

Since their inception, “libraries have always been a place where informational and social infrastructures intersect within a physical infrastructure that (ideally) supports that program” (Mattern, 2014). They are “opportunity institutions” that open doors for the disenfranchised, yet many still question the viability of continuing to push the programming of libraries in the context of ever-tightening budgets. Despite their financial struggles, the twenty-first-century library is host to a variety of programming, both traditional and contemporary, supporting literacy, providing gathering spaces, sites of cultural engagement, safe spaces, meeting rooms, and serving as a technology provider. With this weight of wide programming, libraries have become one of the most resilient public institutions in existence. “At every stage, the contexts — spatial, political, economic, cultural — in which libraries function have shifted; they are continuously reinventing themselves and the means by which they provide that information service” (Mattern, 2014). The Seattle Central Library is an important precedent for this thesis due to its contemporary approach to library design. In the design of the Seattle Central Library, Rem Koolhaas attempted to bridge the chasm of competition between the digital and the actual. The architect, prior to approaching the project, believed that contemporary society’s heavy reliance on the digital intensified a danger to institutions like libraries, institutions that housed the actual. With the Seattle Central Library, Koolhaas strived to strike a balance between the digital and the actual, creating a library that centralizes all three, stating that “it is not a matter of either/or… the modern library, especially in a cybercity such as Seattle, must transform itself into an information-dense storehouse aggressively orchestrating the coexistence of all available technologies” (Murphy, 2006). It was designed with this dichotomy of the real and the virtual as its core concept, informing its layered, contemporary, and heavily mobile design language. The designers wanted to rethink the architecture of the twenty-first century library, especially in the context of public space. Ultimately, they argue, that libraries need to respond to the city by providing a “real virtuality,” into which the user is immersed as a part of a public theater “a fluid intersection of spaces through which social actors move, rehearsing their role in civic life” (Murphy, 2006).
Central to the thesis is the library’s placement by the river. This public library’s community importance has led to an ideal tool for strengthening Richmond’s relationship with the river by providing a social point for engagement with the natural resources through the library’s library. This library has served as a powerful tool for grounding this public library in the city of Richmond.

Richmond is not the first city to have a long, complex relationship with the river. Once hubs of transportation and power, many cities were built on rivers. From the beginning, “settlements have been located at the water’s edge and it is in these locations that the greatest cultures and empires of history developed” (Simone, 2014). The symbolic relationship between the river and the city has been deeply rooted. “Cities and rivers were (and are) intimately linked to each other; they have worked and shaped each other in a multitude of ways and aspects” (Khalil, 2017, pg. 3). Throughout history, cities have been shaped by the river they flowed over, whether it is a river that built them up, shaped them, or even caused them to exist as well as the role urbanization and industrialization played in this story.

Now, river reclamation projects are popping up around the world to promote urban renewal and the creation of functional and beautiful community spaces. The results of river reclamation projects have proven to be “unparalleled catalysts for urban renewal, spurring the creation of functional and beautiful community spaces” (Allen, 2013). But why rivers? These natural entities are an essential resource for almost all larger, old cities, providing the fuel to their power and the foundation of their existence, and, as such, the river-city relationship provides an angle from which to advance comparative urban history with a focus on the relationship of cities to their natural environments” (Khalil, 2017, pg. 3). Promoting public space at Richmond’s riverfront is essential in the story of urban identity and culture. Public space marks the limits of the idea of the city; where it does not exist, one may speak of urbanization but not really of the city.” (Steed, 2004, pg. 72). Creating a civic amenity like a public library on Richmond’s riverfront will create a site-specific community environment that speaks directly to the city itself.

The James River runs directly through Richmond, but there is a continued feeling of the river being at the city’s back. As a result, the center of Richmond’s industry is from an institutional standpoint, the relationship has become one of apathy. Despite the dereliction of its islands, they are loved by locals, towpaths are limited but used, and one glossy restaurant can be found at the river’s edge. The rest of Richmond’s riverfront property is either overgrown or slowly being sold off to private entities like Dominion Energy that moved in and gated-off the landscape from public use.

A public library at Richmond’s riverfront would provide a protected access point to this natural resource, a refuge for observation, and a place more in connection with this essential urban resource. The library would be a site-specific public space, a place truly in reference to and residing in the city of Richmond.

**RICHMOND’S URBAN PATH: THE JAMES RIVER**

**PUBLIC SPACE MARKS THE LIMITS OF THE IDEA OF THE CITY. WHERE IT DOES NOT EXIST, ONE MAY SPEAK OF URBANIZATION BUT NOT REALLY OF THE CITY.**

*of Richmond’s riverfront property is either paragon of decay being studied in picturesque memoirs or Richmond’s dirty little secret.*
DESIGN THEORY

As opportunity spaces for information and connection, human-centric design theories are the core of successful library design. These theories also provide the foundational logic for helping this library connect people to the place in which they live and design theories explored as part of this goal include Place Attachment and Identity as well as Prospect and Refuge. To accomplish a sense of place in the library’s interior design to draw a connection between a city and culture as well as a connection between people that use the library and the place surrounding it. Further research exploring effective traits of the city, river, and culture will be the needs of twenty-first-century library patrons will inform the designs that will define this site-specific community library.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research is to explore the use of a public library’s interior design to draw a connection between a city and culture as well as a connection between people that use the library and the place surrounding it. Further research exploring effective traits of the city, river, and culture will be the needs of twenty-first-century library patrons will inform the designs that will define this site-specific community library.

The theory of Place identity takes on a broader examination of how we relate to our environment on a sociological level. researcher examining Hildebrand’s work, writes that “one can find oneself in both their individual and community identity” (Brown & Perkins, 1992). As people move through interior space, they seek a sense of security, especially when exploring a new environment. Low and Altman define Place Attachment as a trait that “reflects and shapes one’s perceptions of how protected they are against possible threats” (1992, p. 283). Place Attachment theory delves even deeper into the individual to connect to their environment, they must be able to survey their prospect and from their prospect able to see what’s coming while limiting their feeling of exposure. As people move through interior space, they seek a sense of safety, freedom, control, and creativity. Since applied the theory of Prospect and Refuge to interiors (1975). While its history lay in landscapes, researchers have since applied the theory to help library designers create a more specific environment, not just for the place, but for the people that use it.

As people move through interior space, they seek a sense of security, especially when exploring a new environment. Stamps, a researcher examining Hildebrand’s work, writes that “one can find oneself in both their individual and community identity” (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Furthermore, they suggest that these changing environments to continue to relate to the identity of that place and helping the users reflect and shape people’s understanding of who they are as individuals as well as their place as part of a group (Brown & Perkins, 1992). In the built environment, sensation and adaptive reuse play a role in this (Brown & Perkins, 1992). These changes in environment, yet can still maintain and enhance one’s adaptedness, allowing individuals as well as their place as part of a group (Brown & Perkins, 1992). In the built environment, sensation and adaptive reuse play a role in this. Brown and Perkins state that, “renovation is an example of an activity that changes physical settings . . . [that] helps to define who and of what people have become exceedingly important to one’s Place Attachment. The tools to helping them relate to that environment come from learning the identity of that place and taking the users’ history. In doing so, a connection will be drawn between these two urban entities as well as a connection between the people that use the library and the place surrounding it. Further research exploring effective traits of the city, river, and culture will be the needs of twenty-first-century library patrons will inform the designs that will define this site-specific community library.

The tools to helping them relate to that environment come from learning the identity of that place and taking the users’ history. In doing so, a connection will be drawn between these two urban entities as well as a connection between the people that use the library and the place surrounding it. Further research exploring effective traits of the city, river, and culture will be the needs of twenty-first-century library patrons will inform the designs that will define this site-specific community library.
The purpose of this study was to explore the physical, aesthetic, social, and contextual attributes of public libraries through a series of case studies that would reveal what defines the contemporary needs of libraries in the twenty-first century and how their public spaces can be re-grounded in context.

Some key research questions used in these case study analyses include:
1. What do people do with libraries today?
2. How do libraries respond to the context in which they are sited?
3. What are the roles public libraries serve in twenty-first-century cities?
4. How have public libraries shaped their contexts?
5. How have libraries adapted to fill the needs of the library and its patrons and the waterfront? Each library responded differently to its site, were neighborhood libraries, two were urban, and one was rural. These libraries varied in context: one was agricultural, two were neighborhood libraries, and one was a waterfront library, was used most.

OBSERVATION SESSIONS

Observation sessions aided in understanding how the spaces were used and whether these spaces were successful, and how they were used. Meanwhile, observations were made on how the library is used - where people gathered, what services were used most, and whether these spaces were used by singular individuals or groups.

ANALYSIS

Data collected from observation, visual documentation, and interviews were analyzed quantitatively. Surveys were used to collect data in regard to patron experiences and perceptions. Interviews were analyzed qualitatively. Site visits which included observation and visual documentation were necessary to observe the primary use of the space, its functionality, and its response to context and patron needs. This study took place in six public libraries.

The methodology for collecting data in these case study analyses included observation, visual documentation, and interviews. It was important to study the interior architecture and its environments.

The study of libraries began with the collection and documentation of situational characteristics, including their location, physical attributes of their sites, and the design responses to that context. Then the collection of physical characteristics of the library, gathered through interview, analysis, and examination of the site, program, and architectural attributes. These interior architectural analyses included documenting the use of color, material, the square footage of each programmatic space, furniture, fixtures, lighting, and views. In this observation session, the researcher observed and documented the architectural characteristics of the library, what services were used most, and whether these spaces were used by singular individuals or groups.

And, finally, the researcher observed and documented the architectural characteristics of the library, what services were used most, and whether these spaces were used by singular individuals or groups.

To understand the importance of these spaces as well as their context, a well-rounded approach, this study includes interviews with librarians, designers, and patrons. Here, the researcher sketched, photographed, made notes, and evaluated to understand the reasons behind them - what specific needs they filled or did not fill, whether or not they were successful, and how they were used. Meanwhile, observations were made on how the library is used - where people gathered, what services were used most, and whether these spaces were used by singular individuals or groups.

To further understand the impact and design of public libraries, a series of interviews and surveys were conducted. To have a multifaceted understanding of public libraries, librarians and designers were interviewed, while a large pool of patrons were surveyed. A similar series of questions were asked in each interview with designers and librarians, with each library's patronage. Designers were interviewed regarding their experiences in designing libraries, and how context is involved in the process.

A survey was used to collect data in regard to patron experiences and perceptions. Interviews were analyzed qualitatively. Site visits which included observation and visual documentation were necessary to observe the primary use of the space, its functionality, and its response to context and patron needs. This study took place in six public libraries. While all libraries studied were public, the characteristics of these libraries varied in context: one was agricultural, two were neighborhood libraries, two were urban, and one was a waterfront. Each library responded differently to its site, shared characteristics of the library, and its patrons and groundings in context.

Interview sessions were conducted with librarians, designers, and patrons. To have a multifaceted understanding of public libraries, librarians and designers were interviewed, while a large pool of patrons were surveyed. A similar series of questions were asked in each interview with designers and librarians, with each library's patronage. Designers were interviewed regarding their experiences in designing libraries, and how context is involved in the process. Interviews were analyzed qualitatively. Site visits which included observation and visual documentation were necessary to observe the primary use of the space, its functionality, and its response to context and patron needs. This study took place in six public libraries. While all libraries studied were public, the characteristics of these libraries varied in context: one was agricultural, two were neighborhood libraries, two were urban, and one was a waterfront. Each library responded differently to its site, shared characteristics of the library, and its patrons and groundings in context.
FINDINGS

When interviewing architects and interior designers on how they approached the design of libraries, several questions became important to understand this process: what design strategies guide contemporary library design, how are those designs human-centric, and where do conceptual and contextual inspiration meet.

To each designer, when it came to library design, no two libraries were the same. Andrea Quilici, an architect working with Quinn Evans and who was on the team that designed Varina Library, spoke of how libraries “Were once spaces for gathering information, now they are a place for creating and sharing information.” They were once places for books, but are now places for “books and people.” With what a library holds being as important as those who use it, libraries have become opportunity spaces, meaning designing libraries has become about designing for opportunity.

When approaching these designs, each designer said that concept was the basis for all of their library designs, it was how they sell projects to clients and lay the foundation for every nuance of the design that follows. These concepts can be rooted in the history of the place, the client, the site and landscape, important figures in the community, and the patrons and community itself. These conceptual drivers become the foundation of storytelling that defines the design of the whole project. Key to these designs is the way people interact within them. Quilici liked to think of this on three levels, a logic similar to the other designers interviewed: alone, alone with others, with others. These three levels of personal interaction were approached similarly by all designers interviewed. Twenty-first-century libraries, unlike those of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, require a communal component, causing a need for multiple types of gathering and individual spaces.

DESIGNER INTERVIEWS

When interviewing architects and interior designers on how they approached the design of libraries, several questions became important to understand this process: what design strategies guide contemporary library design, how are those designs human-centric, and where do conceptual and contextual inspiration meet.

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Librarians found similar changes in the needs of patrons. While people use the library space to gather, they also want privacy. Patrons use the library to study privately, in small groups, or host business meetings, the variety of gathering types require varied spaces. People want to gather at libraries but also want spaces that are align with digital programming and “explorative classes” for Adobe, coding, music classes, and so on. Design and access to computers. Civic needs are also essential to current library programs like ESL classes, research through reference interviews, and club meetings. Computers and gathering spaces are popular as well as children’s story time.

While technology advances and the need for access and education is becoming more necessary in libraries, in these interviews, librarians also realized much of what is needed from these community hubs are the same. Adrienne Minnock, Director of Richmond’s Libbie Mill Library said that much of what is needed from these community hubs are the same. The digital and the actual mesh well in contemporary library programs. People still value the medium, “Humans want story.” People are curious and they use libraries to satisfy and engage with that curiosity.

When it came to the design of libraries, almost all librarians emphasized the importance of spaciousness, light in every room and controlling acoustics. Librarians conduct a great deal of research alongside their patrons, delving deeply into topics from external curiosities to academic endeavors to develop personal interests. These types of meetings are necessary in libraries, yet they want to engage in personal interests. A lot of patrons seek fun in their study and reading spaces, playful furniture and beautiful views create hospitable environments for these interactions.

“LIBRARIES WERE ONCE PLACES FOR BOOKS, BUT ARE NOW PLACES FOR “BOOKS AND PEOPLE.”
PATRON SURVEYS

To get a better understanding of how people use their libraries, what they need from them, and how they feel about them, fifty-eight library patrons were surveyed on their experiences. These surveys were circulated online by the author, then further passed along by those who took the survey. A total of forty-five surveys were collected; thirty-three from female and twelve from male library patrons of all ages, genders, and socio-economic circumstances.

Those surveyed were asked what was memorable about their experiences in their community libraries, what they like about these spaces, what they use and engage with when they visit, and how they feel these spaces connect to their sense of self or culture. The authors discussed how certain libraries could contribute to a sense of place attachment, or a preference based on the perceived image of a place (Hull, 1992) as well as place identity, a theory rooted in the idea that there are “essential natural characteristics that identify a place” (Hague & Jenkins, 2004, p. 5). A further goal was to see if there were surveys in line with cultivating a sense of the environment surrounding the library within the interior. With the rise of mixed-use buildings in the 21st century, there were also questions included to find out if there should be a mixed-use of this building to better meet the needs of the surrounding community.

When asked about their impression of the impact public libraries have on their communities, 92% of patrons responded positively. Additionally, most respondents answered positively to questions asking if they felt their libraries reflected their local culture or attachment to their hometown. Libraries offered almost all responses were community or socially based. 66% wanted demonstration and workshop spaces for new skills and activities as well as language and job help. 70% were interested in a cafe, with added comments of programming. 50% wanted makerspace, craft, or coffee discussion groups, 46% wanted a learning garden. Other popular suggestions for desired experiences were maker spaces, free museums, screenings, music, and book readings.

The data collected suggested a desire for libraries to serve both individual and communal needs. One respondent wrote, “Libraries I’ve been to grow up and recently have all been so dull and simple. I would definitely enjoy a library that has a more aesthetic design.” A similar sentiment can be found across the board on for support and connection, and a place to consume the culture of their city through clubs, workshops, or local views. Librarians and designers alike suggest that these public institutions as environments for quiet, culture, and education are no less true today, but the media for these has evolved and expanded to include discussion, demonstration, and the digital.

Based on the interviews, surveys, and case studies examined for this research, a strong case is made for a public library as a community hub or a city. Users want to relate to these spaces, tax advising, screenings, music, and e-book rentals, a place to work and study specific programs and offerings. Patrons most favored book options for communal gathering. When it came to more popular suggestions for desired experiences were maker spaces, tax advising, screenings, music, and book readings.

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Six libraries were analyzed through site visits and visual observation to create an understanding of the American public library over time and how they respond to context. These libraries included contemporary libraries like the Varina Library serving the agricultural community of Richmond, the Bellevue and Francis Gregory Neighborhood Libraries in Washington DC that were built in conjunction with one another to serve the unique needs of two DC neighborhoods, the historic and urban New York Public Library and Morgan Libraries, and the riverfront Hunters Point Library in New York.

As these libraries were examined, it became clear that understanding their response to place intersected with understanding their response to the needs and perceptions of the people using them at the time they were built. Of these libraries, three were contemporary, save for the New York Public Library and the private-turned-public Morgan Library. At the time these two libraries were built, like today, libraries were meant to be the “living rooms” of the cities in which they resided, but what was different was their response to context. At the time the New York Public Library was built, the view of the environment surrounding it was “one of communion;” the street corner was common, while the library was a place for reflection. As you went to the library, you became yourself from city, life. It was an environment for the self-improvement and learning for ideals and landscapes. The result of this perspective was a very introspective library space. Details of the library were made without distraction from the outside world: The center of the rooms was reserved for individual study. These spaces were just made for inward thought. The same plan is reflected in the Morgan Library. These interiors have no views: their windows placed above one’s eye line instead, the views are made inside the space — sculpture, bas relief, mural, and focused on learning. Art imagery expresses idealism, philosophy, and history, encouraging its patrons to focus inward, away from the city, and on self-betterment.

Today, as reflected in the Varina, Bellevue, Francis Gregory, and Hunters Point libraries, libraries are for connection. They provide a variety of study and reading spaces from individual and quiet to collaborative and social. These plans are focused outward-oriented toward views of the surrounding landscape and city to encourage connection with place and community. The details of the imagery outside and interior to the buildings reflect the surrounding urban context. These interiors have views, their windows placed at one’s eye line. The result that is revealed in historic libraries that prioritize and facilitate place attachment and introspection while contemporary libraries prioritize and facilitate connection and attachment to place.
VARINA LIBRARY
Quinn Evans
Richmond, VA
Built 2016
44,000 SF
Built to respond to the agricultural culture of Varina, this library is composed of a series of barn-inspired pavilions and walled sheds that open up the wetlands that back the library. Its interiors borrow from agricultural themes to relate the community surrounding it. Its program was adjusted from a typical library to accommodate community needs - building around the sacred tree at its entrance used for Native American ceremonies, incorporating a kitchen for farm-to-table workshops and classes, and an amphitheater for music nights and live music.

Sensitive design decisions in the interior evoke a strong sense of nature to create an impression of the community and landscape that surrounds it - thin columns tilted to echo the trees outside, wood paneling, overlooks built into the spaces, and patterns that mimic tree limbs and gravel.

HUNTERS POINT LIBRARY
Steven Holl Architects
Queens, New York, NY
Built 2019
22,000 SF
Along the edge of the East River stands Hunters Point Library. Essentially a box, it has the organic shapes of its windows carved into the exterior to allow bright sunlight and sweeping views to the river. Designed to mimic the body of water, the concept can truly be seen in section - circulation wrapping and winding through the building and the interior experience of those serpentine windows translating into one that echoes the levels and shapes of the river outside.

Photos by Paul Warchol, sections by Steven Holl Architects
David Adjaye was selected to design two neighborhood libraries, William A. Lockridge Bellevue Library and Francis A. Gregory Library, that would respond to their neighborhoods. William A. Lockridge Library resides within the hilly Bellevue neighborhood of Washington DC and these slopes provided the inspiration for the design. The structure rises from the earth in a series of pavilions that barely touch the earth. To emphasize these changes in elevation, it rises in three levels, wrapping circulation both around the perimeter and coiling it tight at the building’s corner. Bold colors highlight these changes in elevation, their angular slopes echoing the neighborhood outside.

Photos by the author.

This library sits on Fort Davis Park in DC’s Hillcrest neighborhood. Adjaye’s design draws from the site, reflecting and emphasizing its shaded, forest environment. Clad entirely in reflective glass, the exterior has an almost mirror-like experience, appearing and disappearing into the trees. On the interior, a three-dimensional wood screen lines the perimeter, creating a warm and wooded sense of enclosure.

Like the Bellevue library, this library uses bold colors for wayfinding and in strong contrast to its natural setting.

Photos by the author.
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
(SCHWARZMAN BUILDING)

New York City, New York

Built in 1897

The Schwarzman Building was designed to be the "living room" for New York, a library concept that has continued into the 21st century. From its construction, the Beaux-Arts library stands as the perfect example of an ideal American library for decades to come. Its organization forming what is considered to be a traditional library layout. 

At the time, libraries were purely for the consumption of knowledge and, such, about self-betterment and idealism, located in the thick of New York City. Libraries were meant to be an escape from the incivility and grime of daily life. Lifted on wide stairs above the city streets, the library offeredQuiet, introspection, and knowledge. With this mindset as its driving force, the library’s layout is designed to focus inward. Stacks rise high on the perimeters with catwalks to reach the upper shelves, windows are purely for light, not views. Dense ornamentation tells stories of virtue and allegory. At the center of each floor is where patrons work and study. Lines of tables and chairs with small lamps, looking inward. This library responds to its environment by removing distractions from it, fully turning inward and away from the city outside.

MORGAN LIBRARY

Manhattan, New York, NY

Built 1906 (expansion in 2012)

Constructed only a few years following the New York Public Library, the Morgan Library follows the tradition of the time with interiors designed for introspection in each room. Pierpont Morgan’s library and collection line the perimeter while a few artifacts reside in cases at the center. Work and observation happens at the mostly-empty central space of each room. Along the walls, stacks of books reach the ceilings. There are no views to the city outside - windows placed high for light and, in many cases, housing stained glass. Like the New York Public Library, this library looks inward for the purpose of separating and elevating the user from the world outside.

Photographs by the author.
While gathering research for the program and design for Richmond’s waterfront community library, I looked at precedents for site-specific libraries that referenced their waterfronts. These projects included:

**THE ROYAL LIBRARY**
Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects
Copenhagen, Denmark

**KIKUCHI CITY CENTRAL LIBRARY**
Nomura Co., LTD
Kumamoto, Japan

**OPENBARE BIBLIOTHEEK AMSTERDAM**
Jo Coenen & Co Architekten
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Seated at the heart of Copenhagen, the Royal Library rises at the river’s edge. It is also called “The Black Diamond” on account of its black granite and glass exterior. It is one of the largest libraries in the world and home to the Royal Library, the National Museum of Photography, a bookshop, cafe, and the Dronningesalen concert hall. It is the point where history, culture, and community meet.

The library opens to the river with a massive incision in its facade, glowing at night and providing panoramic views during the day. The interior of the building is oriented toward these views, opening around the split in the facade. Soft undulating curves and walkways locate the user and bridge outside, bringing the river in while scattering the user’s focus outward. The building splits to open itself to the outside; the depth of the river, exposed and opened up. The building is split by an undulating incision to the river, with bridges that span the interior, the way bridges span the river. There is an awareness of an undulating incision where the river informed its design. The organization brings the river in, while orienting the user’s focus outward.

RELEVANCE
- Library built directly on the river
- Merging of two of Copenhagen’s main amenities: the river and the Royal Library
- Cultural building - the Royal Library, the Dronningesalen concert hall, the National Museum of Photography, bookshop, and a cafe
- Design centered on the river

Images (from left to right):
36.1 THE BUILDING CENTRALLY Sited above the river, the building is oriented to the river, with bridges that span the interior, the way bridges span the river. This is the moment in the building where it is most obvious that the river informed its design.

37.1 CIRCULATION
Users circulate through the building’s escalators and bridges. Its design encourages movement at the space from the layers of transparency, stacked bridges, and materiality. Light, being interior light, gives a feel of openness, as well as compression and release - guiding the viewer through the space and to the river view.

37.2 RIVER VIEW
Here, the building’s relationship with the landscape as well as the surrounding structures. From this angle one can see how the opening connects the split interior, its undulating incision with the reflective river which splits and divides the city.

37.3 SITE
This diagram clearly shows the relationship between the building site to the river. While obvious, it is necessary to show. From this view, the immediacy of this adjacency can be seen and how its volumes and voids echo the river’s shape and its relationship to the city.
KIKUCHI CITY CENTRAL LIBRARY
Nomura Co., LTD
Kumamoto, Japan
Built 2018

On the island of Kyushu, the Kikuchi river runs through the heart of the city, cutting through canyons into the landscape and informing the urban planning of the city. The Kikuchi river is an important part of the city’s identity, holding a personal importance to its citizens. For this reason, when Nomura was commissioned to design the City Central Library, they looked to the river to conceptual guide the library’s design. Using spooling curves, Nomura designed a system of flowing shelves that snake throughout the library. The heights of the shelves vary depending on use - lower shelves for children and higher for adults. They rise up to create walk-closings in distinct areas for patrons to gather. Openings in the shelves provide access to these enclosures, their shapes and sizes unique to the interruptions in the waterways. The variety of seating is offered in the space through a system of “islands.” Custom seating and shelving plans through spooling in the furniture. The volumes do not just evoke the winding river, but also encourage the users to move through the library like they are on a river’s edge - sitting on the rocks and walking along the water. The custom bookshelves are comprised of steel columns with shelves of Japanese ash. They are intentionally open - their transparency allowing librarians to maintain a line of sight, while still giving patrons an impression of enclosure. The 330 linear feet of winding shelves also provide “neighborhoods” by which the books may be organized, reinforcing the library’s system. RELEVANCE
• Library directly inspired by its local river
• Custom-designed bookshelves and seating to evoke a sense of the river
• Successful design - it has become a popular local library, providing site lines and spatial organization for the librarians.

Images (from left to right):
38.1 HEIGHT VARIATION
The winding, organic curves of the library’s shelving system define the space. The heights vary and layer to create terrain while shelves swoop and curve through the space. The volumes respond to use - tall shelves for adults and shorter shelves for children. The variety of seating is offered in the space through a system of “islands.” Custom seating and shelving plans through spooling in the furniture. The volumes do not just evoke the winding river, but also encourage the users to move through the library like they are on a river’s edge - sitting on the rocks and walking along the water.

39.1 INTERIOR ISLANDS
The space uses clusters of interior islands. Custom seating and shelving plans through spooling in the furniture. The volumes do not just evoke the winding river, but also encourage the users to move through the library like they are on a river’s edge - sitting on the rocks and walking along the water. A warm, natural effect is created by the space’s materiality - Japanese ash with a clear sealant and white edges for a clean, warm, feel.

39.2 NOOKS
These openings in the bookshelves allow access to the enclosures created by the tall, winding shelves, while also creating smaller nooks in the space for patrons to gather. Each opening is different, intentionally irregular to imitate interruptions in waterways.
Twenty-six public libraries reside in the city of Amsterdam, the newest and most thoroughly designed of these is the Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA). A multi-use amenity project, this building is host to the Netherlands’ largest public library, retail spaces, a theater, and restaurants. It sits immediately adjacent to the water and its interior is strongly oriented toward these views.

The building is divided into three main spaces, the “base plinth” defined by its sense of free-standing urban, public plaza, the “middle” is the place where books and readers and the “top” is where the other non-library amenities can be found – retail, restaurant, and theater. This three-skin layering of the building conducted by the inner centered section of the Library with the top supermarket, which is the most public-feeling parts of the building.

When tasked to design this building, Jo Coenen & Co chose to “focused on designing the inner world,” making interiors their priority. They set out to design a variety of volumes within the space, varying the sizes and shapes of each to create intimacy, overlooks, and an emphasis toward orientation. They wanted to create “spots,” defined by form, light, and color. They played with dichotomies of light and dark, opened and closed, fast and slow to create a variety of place types throughout these “spots,” fostering a varying of rhythm throughout the library.

RELEVANCE

- Water-front library and major public space in Amsterdam
- Multi-use building with an emphasis on public amenities including the library, theater, retail
- An emphasis on interior to create a strong sense of building and cultural identity
- Using design theories to evolve a variety of space types with the goal of creating a strong sense of building and cultural identity

40.1 ORGANIC & ORTHOGONAL

Here we see an example of two “spots” developed in the Library. The open window-front group work space has an open, spacious feel with everything visible from the inside. The inner, book-lined space uses smaller, denser volumes, darker colors and blue light to create a quieter, private room. Their use of light and form both reflect Jo Coenen & Co’s use of circular forms to create contrast to the orthogonal forms housed in the building.

41.1 LAYERED SPACE

This building houses sub-volumes within its overall space, use of height variation, shape and density, create transitions between these space types here, we can see how the designer creates different areas – a corridor of both the library as well as the open, open-looking research spaces, and, more intimate environments.

41.2 RELATIONSHIP TO RIVER

The plan further exhibits the designer’s division of space through variations of sun and shape. Toward the building’s exterior the spaces are wider and denser, more linear. As one passes closer to the building’s center, the spaces become smaller and denser, and as one moves away the spaces become larger and more open. As one moves away and until they become small collections of circles, these changes signify a movement from a feeling of public to private.
“ARCHITECTURE IS BOUND TO SITUATION... THE SITE IS A METAPHYSICAL LINK, A POETIC LINK, TO WHAT A BUILDING CAN BE.”

STEPHEN HOLL
RICHMOND INTERMEDIATE TERMINAL WAREHOUSE #3

2301 Wharf Street,
Richmond, VA 23223
Built: 1938
29,554 - 44,331 SF

Built as part of the New Deal, the warehouse was built between Richmond’s two main ports - the upper dock located near where the Kanawha Canal intersected the James River and the lower deep-water port located at Rockett’s Landing. Built on piers to protect it from floods, the warehouse once received daily shipments of sugar, peanuts, tobacco, coal, grain, newsprint, gas, and oil.

Today, the Richmond Intermediate Terminal Warehouse 3 stands vacant, windows boarded, its temporarily-closed roads and piers beneath its piers and parking lots across the distance. The grassy plaza crosses the distance from its piers.

Though the building stands vacant, its property borders highly trafficked pedestrian paths and is immediate adjacency to the wharf.

Selected due to:
- Immediate adjacency to the wharf
- History as a major port warehouse
- Current unoccupied and derelict state symbolic of Richmond’s relationship with the James
Site Analysis examining sun paths, views, approaches from Main St., Wharf St and the Capital Trail, bus stops, parking area, and where the water from the James River and Gillie Creek meet the site.

Kevin Lynch’s Image of the City guided much of the site analysis, treating this site as a city and finding its nodes, paths, edges, districts, and landmarks as a way of focusing the design.

Another important subject of analysis was sound. In this diagram, “sound” is pleasant like that of the rushing river, something that is natural and soothing, while “noise” is less pleasant, like what comes from the road.
EXISTING BUILDING
The site on which the Richmond Intermediate Terminal Warehouse #3 sits is a relatively undeveloped swath of land. It has no built neighbors in its immediate adjacency and receives direct sunlight. It has a direct relationship with both the James River and Gillie Creek, while additionally lying at the intersection of Main Street, Wharf Street, and the Capital Trail.

Its piers navigate the slope that drops from the road to the plaza that separated the building from the river. The land surrounding it is green with tall grasses, brush, and small to medium trees.

Note: throughout this book, whenever one is looking at a plan, the road will always be situated above, and the river below.
The Richmond Intermediate Terminal Warehouse #3 resides at the edge of the James River. Just north of Rocketts Landing, landing on the site is a dramatic view of the James River, which creates an undeniably attractive location for the city between these two neighborhoods and resides just at the foot of Fulton Hill.

This city of Richmond was founded where it is today because of the river and the potential settlers saw in it as a port city for trade and commodities. Before the rise of the industrial era, the James River was known as the ‘greatest water trade on the East Coast” (Pool, 2018). The hub of Richmond’s once-bustling industrial riverfront, the port of Richmond was home to the “greatest water trade on the East Coast” (Pool, 2018, p. 8). One of the most important imports coming through the warehouse was Cuban sugar, but as Cuban sugar production diminished, and domestic peanut and tobacco - which had the greatest export volume for the city (Pool, 2018). The river brought goods, transit, irrigation, and opportunity for engagement with the James that would be accessible for everyone.

Before the rise of the industrial era, the port of Richmond was the “greatest water trade on the East Coast.” (Pool, 2018)

The city of Richmond was founded where it is today because of the river and the potential settlers saw in it as a port city. Before the rise of the industrial era, the city (Pool, 2018) was a thriving and industrially diverse community, which had the greatest export volume for the city (Pool, 2018). Before the rise of the industrial era, the riverfront was an important connection with the city (Pool, 2018). The riverfront’s history is important to the development of this adaptive reuse project. Allowing this history to act as a point of origin in approaching the design of the Library, understanding the history of connection along the river is crucial in connecting the city with the rest of the region (Pool, 2018). To emphasize connection in the space, the river's connection with the city edible and visually apparent throughout the library. These views are at various elevations and include other library spaces, as well as strong viewing points throughout the space. These views are at various elevations in the library to provide different senses of observation. Lower viewpoints give a feeling of being on the river’s shore while upper viewpoints allow you to look out over the river, a breezeway was created in the library’s central space (Pool, 2018). The history of this stretch of Richmond’s riverfront is important to the development of this adaptive reuse project. Allowing this history to act as a point of origin in approaching the design of the Library, understanding the history of connection along the river is crucial in connecting the city with the rest of the region (Pool, 2018). To emphasize connection in the space, the river’s connection with the city edible and visually apparent throughout the library. These views are at various elevations and include other library spaces, as well as strong viewing points throughout the space. These views are at various elevations in the library to provide different senses of observation. Lower viewpoints give a feeling of being on the river’s shore while upper viewpoints allow you to look out over the river, a breezeway was created in the library’s central space (Pool, 2018). The history of this stretch of Richmond’s riverfront is important to the development of this adaptive reuse project. Allowing this history to act as a point of origin in approaching the design of the Library, understanding the history of connection along the river is crucial in connecting the city with the rest of the region (Pool, 2018). To emphasize connection in the space, the river’s connection with the city edible and visually apparent throughout the library. These views are at various elevations and include other library spaces, as well as strong viewing points throughout the space. These views are at various elevations in the library to provide different senses of observation. Lower viewpoints give a feeling of being on the river’s shore while upper viewpoints allow you to look out over the river, a breezeway was created in the library’s central space (Pool, 2018). The history of this stretch of Richmond’s riverfront is important to the development of this adaptive reuse project. Allowing this history to act as a point of origin in approaching the design of the Library, understanding the history of connection along the river is crucial in connecting the city with the rest of the region (Pool, 2018). To emphasize connection in the space, the river’s connection with the city edible and visually apparent throughout the library. These views are at various elevations and include other library spaces, as well as strong viewing points throughout the space. These views are at various elevations in the library to provide different senses of observation. Lower viewpoints give a feeling of being on the river’s shore while upper viewpoints allow you to look out over the river, a breezeway was created in the library’s central space (Pool, 2018).
This public library will be a bridge between the city of Richmond and the James River. The interior acts as an eddy in a river, providing a quiet, calm environment that celebrates the James and the city with views to the water and the Richmond skyline.
MAKING EDDIES

When focusing on traits specific to the James River, a few forms became apparent, including those of its large, sun-bleached white boulders rising from the rapids and sun-drenched, rocky outcroppings. These provide inspiration for forms within the library as well as seating opportunities and meandering circulation patterns that reflect that of the river.

SUBTRACTIVE DESIGN

Searching for methods to open the opaque building to the river, subtractive design became exceedingly important. Carving into its floors and ceilings to create viaduct-inspired catwalks and terraced seating was important in connecting the two levels as well as the interior to the exterior.
MASS OF BUILDING vs. LIGHTNESS OF PIERS

LEVELS OF BUILDING vs. TIDAL LEVELS

MOVING UNDER WATER

RIVER AS NUCLEUS OF THE CITY / INTERSECTION OF PATHS

LEVELS OF BUILDING vs. TIDAL LEVELS

SPACE PLAN - CONNECTIONS B/T FLOORS

RIVER AS NUCLEUS OF THE CITY
200 SF
Occupant Load: 20
A-3 Occupancy Class

Open gathering space at the center of the library. It has a variety of seating opportunities, including windows overlooking the adjacent cafe and panoramic views to the river.

Used by adult and teen patrons, at-risk, genders, states of ability, etc., internal staffing required.

DEEP EDDY

AMPHITHEATER

CIRCULATION DESK

STACKS

OPEN STUDY

LEARNING COMMONS

2500 SF
Occupant Load: 40
Group A-3 Occupancy

Open work and study space that can accommodate individuals and small groups providing both desk/table space as well as lounge space.

Used by patrons of all ages, races, genders, states of ability, etc.

DEEP EDDY

AMPHITHEATER

CIRCULATION DESK

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Used by patrons of all ages, races, genders, states of ability, etc.

DIGITAL COMMONS

CHILDREN’S LIBRARY

OPEN STUDY

LEARNING COMMONS

2000 SF
Occupant Load: 20
A-3 Occupancy Class

Open forum for reflection and discussion. Provides the key access point for the community and the river.

Used by adult and teen patrons, all races, genders, states of ability, etc.; Minimal staffing required.

DIGITAL COMMONS

CHILDREN’S LIBRARY

OPEN STUDY

LEARNING COMMONS

2000 SF
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A-3 Occupancy Class

Open forum for reflection and discussion. Provides the key access point for the community and the river.

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Open work and study space that can accommodate individuals and small groups providing both desk/table space as well as lounge space.

Used by patrons of all ages, races, genders, states of ability, etc.
Refinement of relationships between key spaces in the library.

Adjacencies between the spaces that flow around the library’s central eddy.
The existing building has a rigid, orthogonal structure. Comprised of reinforced concrete, it has a grid of fifty columns.

This unyielding orthogonal structure creates two natural axes that directly relate to the site with the roads to the north, the city to the west, Rocketts Landing and downriver to the east, and the river to the south.

Those axes create view corridors that define the plan. Administrative and support programming creates a buffer between the road and the library. The children’s section and study spaces have views to the city and river, and the amphitheater and overlook have views to the river and downriver. At the center of the building, the main atrium, rises, the river enters and all other programming flows around the gathering space.
SPACE PLANNING
SECTIONS

TRANSVERSE SECTION (1)
Level 01 - Deep Eddy, Children’s Section, and Conference Room
Level 02 - Deep Eddy, Studio, Open Study

TRANSVERSE SECTION (2)
Level 01 - Amphitheater, Admin
Level 02 - Teen section
USER JOURNEY
PRIMARY SPACES
When entering the River City Library, one immediately encounters the Deep Eddy. This monumental, double-height space acts as an eddy in a river. All spaces are organized and flow around this central area. With its sweeping views of the landscape, depth, and its role as a hub for gathering, it is the place where the river truly enters the library.

On level 01, it has an immediate adjacency to the circulation desk for librarians to greet and orient patrons as they enter the building as well as the Pop-Up Cafe and the Children’s Library. Following the soft line of the Deep Eddy’s curve is a semi-transparent wood screen that divides this space from a breakout. Here, “the Story of the River” is told – an opportunity to convey the history of the James River from the lens of the original Native Americans that lived here, the trade of enslaved peoples, the industrial revolution, to present – as one follows the curve, their journey through history ends with a view of the James River today.

To reach level 02, one may either ascend through the elevator or the stair that follows the curve of the screen. At the top, one encounters the catwalk. From here, one may follow the lines of the deep eddy to enjoy this space from above, the view into this gathering space, the panoramic river, or the undulating ceiling grid.
CONCRETE
Floor (polished)
Wall (sealed)

WOOD SCREEN
(CUSTOM)
Armstrong
Stair / breezeway

GLASS
McGrory Glass
Railings panels

ATMOSPHERA (light wood)
Arktura
Ceiling

CHROME PANELS
Armstrong
Ceiling/Lunderside of catwalk

LIGHTBOX STACKS
Custom

NORK CHAIR + OTTOMAN
Fjords Spinnaker
Lounge seating along window

BANK LOUNGE CHAIR
Blu Dot
Central/cafe seating

FREE FORM TABLE
Karl Springer Ltd.
Central/cafe seating

SOLAR TRAC SOHO
Shades
Mecho Shade
Along all windows

COLOR PALETTE
This product has a custom installation to meet the lighting and acoustic needs of the library. Its undulating fins flow over the existing hard, orthogonal building structure as water would over rocks. These pale wood fins are installed at an average depth of 2'-0" and every 6" on center. Linear pendants are pocketed into the system to provide lighting and emphasize its rolling form while acoustic panels are installed on the roof membrane to control sound.
The Amphitheater evokes a feeling of sitting on the river’s shore. The organic curves of its terraced levels reflect the rolling slope of the landscape while its warmer palette and linear textures provide a sense of the vegetation outside. The custom ceiling is comprised of 3Form resin tubes lit from above to give a sense of the ephemeral quality of tall grasses blowing in the breeze, something found when sitting on the James River’s shoreline.

To increase accessibility for those with limited mobility, the elevator has a rear-entry onto the fourth tier of the amphitheater. This allows one to be part of this experience and equally immersed regardless of physical ability.
**Concrete**
- Floor (polished)
- Wall (sealed)

**Collection Altered CPT**
- Shaw Contract
- Terraced seating

**Wood Screen (Custom)**
- Armoring
- Along walls

**Glass**
- McGrory Glass
- Panels b/t Amphitheater + Overlook

**Concrete Wall Graphic**
- Custom design / SW paint
- Elevator exterior walls

**Womb Chair**
- Custom design / SW paint
- All levels

**Puck Pouf**
- Enea
- All levels

**Amber Resin Ceiling Installation**
- 3Form (custom)
- Ceiling

**Solar Shade Soho Shades**
- Mecho Shade
- Along all windows

**Color Palette**
- Neutral
- Bright
- Warm
- Cool
- Blues
- Greens
- Yellows

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**Shaw Contract**

**Along walls**

**Knoll**

**All levels**

**Enea**

**All levels**
CIRCULATION DESK
LEVEL 01 / LEVEL 02

Positioned to optimize line of sight and accessibility to patrons, the library’s two main circulation desks are positioned on both level 01 and level 02 with immediate adjacency to main circulation paths. On level 01, the desk is just off the Deep Eddy, near the main stair and elevator, and immediately adjacent to the front door to receive people as they enter. On level 02, it holds a similar position, just off the Deep Eddy and immediately adjacent to the catwalk and overlook. In both cases, the circulation desk has 360-degree views of the space to optimize the librarians’ line of sight. On the second level, the stacks are installed on an angle to give librarians at the circulation desk a full view of the walkways between them.

This desk is round to encourage circulation around it and has a back component for storage and to promote a feeling of enclosure for the librarians using it. Comprised of wood and concrete with limited plastic and metal accents, its heavy materials reflect that of the building. They promote a solid, permanent feel to reinforce its importance in the institution it resides within.

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COLOR PALETTE

WOOD SCREEN (CUSTOM)
Armstrong paneling
Along stair / breezeway

GLASS
McGrory Glass Racing panels

CONCRETE
Floor (polished)
Wall (sealed)

WOOD
SCREEN (CUSTOM)
Armoring
Along stair / breezeway

CONCRETE + WOOD
Concrete + hardwood paneling
Reflections
Desktop

LINEAR LINE PANELS
Plyboo
PLACEMENT

SILQ CHAIR
Steelcase
Zinc desk task chair

ALPHABET OF LIGHT
CIRCULAR
Artemide (custom)
Above circ desk

CONCRETE + WOOD
Concrete + hardwood paneling
Reflections
Desktop
Residing on level 01, just off the Deep Eddy and with sweeping views of the river and city skyline is the Children’s Library. Here a variety of interaction points were necessary to meet the needs of how children use libraries. Along the windows is boulder-inspired soft seating. The large, organic cushions are stacked and movable to allow children to climb, play, lounge and read on them at the water’s edge the way one would on the shore of the James River. Separating this area from the children’s stacks are curved work tables for reading, activities, and play. All furniture in this space is rounded to accommodate the higher activity levels of this children’s space. Meanwhile, softer and sound absorbent materials like the soft seating, the window bench, and acoustic panels are installed throughout the space to meet the acoustic needs of this higher-volume children’s space.

The floor to ceiling height of level 01 is 16’-0”. To bring this down to a more comfortable scale for children, the ceiling is color-blocked to a height of 8’-0”. To further lower the height, acoustic clouds and pendant lights are floated over the boulder seating.
In the twenty-first century, the acts of reading, studying, or gathering are seldom done without a warm drink in hand. With the area surrounding the library without many amenities to meet this commonplace desire, the library’s Pop-Up cafe provides the opportunity to bring city’s many small businesses and cafes to the river on a rotating basis.

The palette for this space is comprised of warm wood, textured concrete, and a variety of blues. LVT is installed on the floor to provide more comfort to those working as opposed to the existing polished concrete. A glowing stretch ceiling above provides an even light to the cafe as well as some acoustic control.
Breaking the unrelenting orthogonal column-grid of the library, the stacks are installed on a diagonal to both promote line of sight for the librarians at the circulation desk and encourage meandering through the shelves. This library uses shelves with built-in lighting to showcase their offerings. A custom wall graphic depicting the map of Richmond is installed on the backwall to promote a sense of placemaking.

The contemporary library is more social than libraries of the past, requiring them to accommodate a variety of seating options from communal to semi-private to private. On either side of the library’s main stacks are open-study spaces. On the road-side of the stacks is high-backed privacy seating while the river side has communal work tables and the Digital Commons, where computers, scanners, and printers can be used.

COLOR PALETTE

GLASS

McGrory Glass

Railing panels

STACKS (small)

Estey Shelving

HIGHBACK WORK SEAT

Muuto (Maharam - Ellipsis upholstery)

Along back window

WALL GRAPHIC

Custom Graphic / SW Back wall

STACKS (small)

Easy Shelving

SOLID TRAC SEHD SHADES

Mecho Shade

Along all windows

ATMOSPHERA (light wood)

Ambi ceiling

STACKS + STUDY

LEVEL 02

CORK/CONCRETE

Floor (polished) Wall (sealed)
CATWALK
LEVEL 02

The catwalk marks the moment where the Deep Eddy, level 01 and level 02 meet. This walkway is pulled off the facade to give it the impression of crossing a viaduct like the ones found crossing the James River.

From here, one may access either the open study area on one side or the overlook and circulation desk on the other.
The core goal of this library was to design a site-specific community experience for the city of Richmond. It was to be a beacon at the edge of the James River that would enhance the city’s connection to this body of water that winds through it. I wanted it to hold a place in time and memory in Richmond, acknowledging the past while making room for the future. It was important that these spaces be universally accessible for a community of diversity, the roots of Richmond.

As I began this project, I found that while designing the interior, I could not keep my eyes off the exterior. This duality led to a long conversation between the outside and the inside that would continue throughout the thesis, one that ebbed and flowed as the two entities pushed and pulled against one another. For this River City library, it became clear that the inside must come out and the outside come in. As the journey began, I found that context was not something to resist or fight against but rather the other player in a constant conversation to be had when venturing into the interior. The site was the canvas for this story.

Through mixed-method research in the forms of interviews, surveys, site visits and observation, evidence was uncovered to inform the design of this library and reinforce its role as a community-engagement hub. This research fueled the emphasis on gathering spaces versus private spaces, site-specific design and motifs, and the incorporation of the amphitheater and pop-up cafe. The case study analyses played an especially heavy role in the design development, revealing for me the most about what had to be in my design and its potential for innovation. The learning curve was wide. But, as I began, I learned that as a designer, using research to guide my process opened doors to unlimited potential for new ways of making space, living, and experiencing the places in which we move. It was the key to designing holistically.

This thesis adds to the body of knowledge of interior design through sensitive space planning and the incorporation of a sense of history, place, and context. Above all, it contributes to the body of knowledge of interiors in how it addresses the exterior environment. The key to the design was to fuse, its contextual response and site-sensitive design. Allowing the exterior to play a significant role in the interior’s development was central to this library, a method that should be incorporated into all interior projects.

This project repurposes an existing two-story vacant warehouse at the edge of the James River to create a community library space. The interior spaces draw from the organic forms and materiality of the river—its rolling water, smooth boulders, and golden grass, as well as the hard, concrete edges of the existing orthogonal structure. Using an undulating grid, reflective and transparent, and both cool and warm palettes drawn from the landscape, this library provides a site-specific community experience.
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