

# Transformations - The Library in Progress

## The Halmstad Conference in Aarhus

### Introduction

For the past 12 years the Halmstad Conference has contributed to inspiration and development in Scandinavian public libraries. This year participants are invited to Aarhus, Denmark, to discuss the development and transformation of the physical library. We have the pleasure to present some of the contributions of the keynote speakers on

the Halmstad Conference which will take place in Aarhus the 13-15 of June 2004.

The articles focus on the main themes of the conference: the future library building in the information era, pervasive computing, cybrarian functions and living culture all as part of the present and future library.

"Transformations – the Library

in Progress" is organized by the "Halmstad Conference Group" and Aarhus Public Libraries with Danish Bibliographic Centre as conference partner.

The conference is supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Danish Library Association, the Norwegian Library Association and Edward Petersen's Foundation.

### Public Display of Affection

## A Glimpse at Our Library of the Near Future

By Jerry Garcia, Head of the local design firm, u.n.d., Seattle

I'm not quite sure how something completely grey, made of steel, and quite stubborn in appearance can pull on heartstrings, but the soon-to-be-completed Seattle Public Library has managed to do it. From the moment it began to sprout crooked legs, the site has been loaded with hope. 28 months later it appears as though we may have something quite special here.

■ The design arrived laden with theory and rhetoric, but the sheer presence of what is taking shape renders all that somewhat irrelevant. It is a visceral experience, which gets down to the basic act of a body occupying space. There is an abruptness to its stature and nature which sets it apart from its neighbors. It is a frankly provocative presence. Even its detractors will find themselves quite surprised by what awaits inside. Upon entering from 5th avenue, the public will be met with a large, light-filled space called "the living room," whose main purpose is just that.

For those of the outdoor loving persuasion, the building should also resonate. It is architecture as landscape of the steel and glass variety. Complete with all the components of a good hike: valleys, meadows, ravines, switchbacks, and lookouts. There will even be carpet with photographic depictions of nature to add to the effect. As with any good hike, there are moments of potential danger and vertigo. Places where one can survey where they've been and scout out the next destination. At the top, there is a gangplank for the brave of

heart to take in the entire surroundings. On the other hand, the skiers of our city will enjoy taking the elevator straight to the top for the money views and the leisurely stroll down.

It is also interesting how the building has activated and engaged existing neighbors. The monumental painting by Sam Francis in the lobby of the building to the west appears to have been anticipating the new libraries arrival. It has been facing the building site for decades and now it's irregular lattice of blue paint serve as a distorted echo to the libraries relentless diamond-shaped windows. It is this angularity which brings into the fold some of its less successful neighbors. The library has somehow managed to anchor the presence of the W Hotel's pyramidal top. When in the main reading room on the tenth floor, one will be looking through a partial pyramid to a completed version on the hotel rooftop to the north.

How refreshing it is to see a big building allow itself to be big. There was clearly no impetus to provide a large palette of overtly friendly materials to break down the scale. The recently completed city hall to the south is a victim of this tactic. It is a fraction of the size of the library yet takes the cafeteria style approach to materials in the hope of having something for everyone. The library simply allows functional requirements and the desire to capitalize on specific views to give it its expression and purpose. It is somehow in sympathy with, while maintaining a level of indifference, to its surroundings. It is this duality that makes it such a compelling animal.

The downtown library will also be the cities best big building at two problematic times for this part of the world. The grayest of winter moments will be this buildings time to shine. The exterior glass takes on a silvery tint which reminds one of looking onto the water of El-

liott Bay. On such days, light appears to come from all directions complete with a near absence of shadows. This building adds to that dynamic. From within, the new library will have so much filtered light, from so many directions, that it will help to redefine a new type of inside for the northwest. The diffused light comes courtesy of a rather ingenious layer of expanded-metal sandwiched between the double-paned window-glass. (This layer which will act as miniature louvers to diffuse the intense light present here during summer.)

At night, the building will serve as the classic beacon of light complete with the shadowy figures of structural elements and abrupt patches of intense color. It is at this time that the transparency allows for distilled gazes at the extraordinary variety of spaces within. The bold overhang of the top floor provides a sublime opportunity for the building to catch the reflections of the moving traffic below. Their white, red, and yellow lights serve to activate the surface in a way that no other big building in Seattle is capable of. The steroid influenced colors and shapes of the EMP appear cryogenically frozen by comparison.

There's a lot going on in this building and the library material itself will only add to the complexity. While it is obvious that some of what is interesting about the library is also quite unintentional, it must be viewed as a product of boldness. That the leap of faith bestowed upon this commission has successfully irrigated the site with potential. This was one of the initial intentions of the project and will ultimately be its greatest contribution.

*Jerry Garcia's work has appeared in "Fine Homebuilding", "Progressive Architecture", and elsewhere.*



The New Central Library from the corner of Fifth Avenue and Spring Street



Southeast corner of the New Central Library

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## The Seattle Public Library

The following floor-by-floor tour highlights special features and services.



### Level 0

#### "Parking"

One level parking

### Level 1

#### "FOURTH AVENUE"

- Book return/check out
- Children's Department
- Auditorium
- Literature / ESL / World Languages
- Restrooms

### Level 2

#### "STAFF"

Staff floor. Shipping, receiving, book sorting and technical and collection services. Not a public floor.

### Level 3

#### "LIVING ROOM/FIFTH AVENUE"

This level is called "The Living Room," and will include comfortable seating where patrons can lounge and read. The carpets will be intensely colored patterns of lifelike plants that replicate the plantings outside the Fifth Avenue entrance. This floor will house the following:

- Book return/check out
- Friends Gift Shop
- Coffee cart with nearby seating for 20
- 3,900-square-foot Teen Center, with small study/project rooms
- Feature Film Video Collection
- Fiction Collection
- Large Print Collection
- Library Equal Access Project
- Library Card registration
- New books
- Northwest Authors Collection
- Popular periodicals and newspapers
- Public pay phones
- Teen Center.

The base of the building's atrium is located on this level. The dramatic space will allow patrons to look up and see the Meeting floor, which is on Level 4 and have a visual connection to the Mixing Chamber on Level 5.

### Level 4

#### "MEETING"

The Meeting floor will feature four major meeting rooms. The largest meeting room will have a capacity for 200 people and the smallest will accommodate 25. Kitchen space for food preparation will be located nearby. Two technology training labs will be available for public and staff computer instruction. The corridor walls, floors and ceilings will be painted in deep reds and pinks, while the meeting rooms will be painted calm, neutral

colors – such as brown and gray. Large graphics on the walls will identify the different rooms.

### Level 5

#### "MIXING CHAMBER"

The Mixing Chamber is where individuals will go to for help with general questions or in-depth research – a trading floor for information. It will fulfill a currently unanswered need: expert interdisciplinary assistance. Many reference questions are interdisciplinary in nature and the Mixing

Chamber will allow individuals to talk with librarians who can provide general information, as well as those who have in-depth subject knowledge. Librarians will have nearby access to extensive reference collections and electronic resources. There will be one reference desk and several areas where librarians will have the ability to work one-on-one with patrons.

Staff members in the Mixing Chamber will be equipped with wireless communication devices. This will allow them to contact librarians in the Books Spiral when needed for additional expert assistance. An internal dumbwaiter will allow easy transport of materials to and from the books spiral. The character of the space will resemble the airline and technology industries – the ceiling will be black and the floor a combination of aluminum and carpet with a metallic look in appearance – silvery and high tech. This floor also will have the largest configuration of technology in one spot – 132 computers and will be the entry to the books spiral. The Quick Information Center will provide telephone reference service on this floor. Virtual reference service via online chat with librarians also will take place in the Mixing Chamber.

### Level 6

#### "BOOKS SPIRAL"

The Books Spiral is a series of flat tiers, connected by gentle ramps. A gradual slope of about 2 degrees winds through the four floors of book stacks. The majority of the nonfiction collection – 75 percent of the entire collection – will be located on the books spiral. This will allow the nonfiction collection to be housed in one continuous run, and avoids the problem having to move books into other rooms or floors when various subject areas expand. The spiral is an architectural organization that allows all patrons – disabled and able-bodied alike – the freedom to move throughout the entire collection without depending on stairs, escalators and elevators. Book shelves are not filled to capacity, so there is room for the collection to grow. Nonprint nonfiction materials (videos, DVDs, CDs, books on tape, are grouped according to format at the beginning of each

Dewey century. Only 25 percent of the Central Library collection will be in closed stacks. Escalator and elevator stops will be labeled with Dewey Decimal System numbers corresponding to materials on each floor. In addition, floor mats throughout the books spiral will highlight Dewey Decimal numbers that match nearby books stacks.

- Books Spiral 6 (000 - 400s) – Government publications, business, small conference room
- Books Spiral 7 (500s - 600s) – Magazines, newspapers, science, aviation, public restrooms
- Books Spiral 8 (700s - 800s) – Art, literature, music CDs, two music practice rooms, small performance arts work space, regional arts collection
- Books Spiral 9 (900s and biographies) – Genealogy, maps, biographies, Writers' Room, small conference room

Each Books Spiral will feature a reference service point, copy machine and computers in the same location on each level. There will be more than 30 computers on each level.

### Level 10

#### "READING ROOM"

This level will feature the light-filled, nearly 12,000-square-foot grand Reading Room. The highest point of the ceiling will reach 40 feet. The Reading Room will include seating for 400 and have vignette views of Elliott Bay. The floors will be dark, walnut-stained wood covered with bright-colored area carpets. The ceiling will feature a large, white acoustical fabric wrap squares. The Seattle Collection will be located at the top of the books spiral, overlooking the Reading Room. An escalator will transport patrons up to the Reading Room.

### Level 11

#### "HEADQUARTERS"

This level will include administrative offices, including the city librarian's office, the Board Room, Human Resources and staff lunch room.

Ceiling will be black and the floor a combination of aluminum and carpet with a metallic look in appearance – silvery and high tech. This floor also will have the largest configuration of technology in one spot – 132 computers and will be the entry to the books spiral. The Quick Information Center will provide telephone reference service on this floor. Virtual reference service via online chat with librarians also will take place in the Mixing Chamber.

For more information, contact Andra Addison, communications director at The Seattle Public Library, 206-386-4103, or [andra.addison@spl.org](mailto:andra.addison@spl.org).

# A Totally Do-It-Yourself Library without a Library Customer Service Desk :

## The Singapore Experience

By Ngian Lek Choh, Assistant Chief Executive, National Library Board, Singapore

Since 1995 when the National Library was set up as a statutory board, the Board has been experimenting with new services to improve service levels, reducing waiting time and to save customer time in the past 7 years. These include services such as the application of radio-frequency identification tagging to cancel books returned automatically without a staff doing it, a computer station that allows customers to check their loan records and to make payments using a cashcard, and a cybrarian service that allows a customer to speak to a

librarian and be guided, without the physical presence of the librarian.

With these automated services in place, the National Library Board decided that it was time to experiment with a concept called the Totally DIY library, to allow the Board to try out the idea of running a library without any staff onsite, yet provide the same level of service to the customers as one with a team of library staff onsite. This new library opened its door to the public on 1 December 2002.

■ The National Library was a government department under the Ministry of Information and the Arts until Sep 1995, when it was converted to a statutory board called the National Library Board (NLB). Since then, the NLB has been experimenting with new services to improve its reach and to raise its level of services.

The Totally Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Library Concept was mooted for a year before the Board felt that the time was ripe for the concept to be tried out.

From the time the Board was formed in 1995, several new services were introduced in NLB's libraries to make library visits hassle-free, enjoyable and enriching. Due to heavy usage on weekends and during school holidays where queuing time could be as long as 45 minutes for returning a book and another 45 minutes to borrow a book, the NLB launched a concerted effort to install self-service machines to remove the queues. This effort was completed in 1998 when all libraries were equipped with 3M self-service machines for borrowing. 24-hour bookdrops were also introduced in all libraries to remove queues in returning and to enable customers to return books on loan anytime of the day or night.

The machines helped to remove queues. However, they did not help much in the returning function as staff was still needed behind the bookdrop to cancel loan of books returned.

Collaboration with a local technology vendor brought about a prototype of the radio frequency tagging (RFID) system which would allow for both the borrowing and returning functions to be automatically handled by the RFID system. This system reduced the returning function to zero queuing time as the loan of any library item returned via the RFID-enabled bookdrop would be cancelled as soon as the item was dropped into the bookdrop. As the book travels down the chute of the bookdrop, a RFID sensor would read the RFID tag and cancels the loan from the library loan system.

Other functions automated included the payment of overdue fines and other payments

via a national cashcard used in Singapore, and checking of loan records online and in real-time. These are functions required by our customers often as many of them could not remember the books they had borrowed and had a habit of asking staff to check for them the outstanding items they owed to the library. With these functions, automated payment of fees to the library also became a breeze.

With all the above functions automated, the library asked itself if there were remaining library functions which needed to be automated in order for customers to transact every function on their own without the assistance of library staff.

We found two such functions: registration of new members and the enquiry service. Work on these functions started as part of the

plan to prototype the Totally DIY library without stationing library staff onsite. This new library was to be called the SengKang Community Library (SKCL).

### Registration of new members

This was an interesting development as the project team struggled with whether we would ask customers to produce their personal identification documents before the library would proceed to register them as new members. The project team decided to take a risk in implementing this new DIY service, and a decision was made not to ask the customer to show their identification documents to staff before activating the membership. Instead, library staff would monitor if there was any abuse of the system after implementation. ►



Ngian Lek Choh, Assistant Chief Executive, National Library Board, Singapore

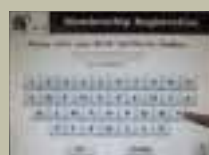


SengKang Community Library (SKCL) Located on 4th Floor of Compass Point, a Shopping Mall



Entrance to library

### How to use the Membership Registration Kiosk



- Select desired function on the touch screen by pressing on it.

Follow the rest of the steps shown on the screen.

- Select the supporting document you wish to use:  
If you are using a
  - NRIC / School Smart Card / Membership card, place the card into the slot with the barcode facing away from you. Remove the card when your NRIC number appears on the screen.
  - Birth Certificate (to register a child), enter the Birth Certificate number as shown.
- Collect your membership card at the end of the transaction.

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A Totally Do-It-Yourself Library  
without a Library Customer Service Desk :

## The Singapore Experience (continued)



Foyer of the library.

Fortunately, to-date, there has not been any report of abuse.

A kiosk was designed to provide this new service, and focus groups were brought into the library to test the service before it opened to the public. Most customers were able to follow the user instruction on the screen without much assistance. Some feedback was gathered and improvements were made to the service before it was launched to the public on 1 Dec 02 when the library was opened officially for business.

### Remote enquiry service – Cybrarian service

The other service that was developed for this new library was the Cybrarian service. This uses the idea of a PC-based co-browsing service where the librarian sits offsite in another library, while the customer making his enquiry would ask his question from a kiosk at the library, wherever it is. The NLB had experimented with this service in 1998 at another library using the video-conferencing facility. When first tried out, both the librarian and the customer could see each other on the screen that they both were looking at. However, feedback from the customers was that they would prefer not to see their own faces on the screen when

using the service. With this customer feedback, the team decided that the second iteration of the cybrarian service would not include the cameras to capture the faces of the customer and librarian, and only the telephone and the co-browsing facilities were provided. Two such stations were installed in the library to provide customers with a remote enquiry service in the SengKang Community Library.

### Results of the prototype

On the first day of the opening of the SKCL, over 12,300 people visited the library, borrowing a total of 13,900 library items. 128 new members registered themselves, and 255 enquiries were made via the Cybrarian service.

It was interesting to note that the usage levels were about the same as any other new library opening, even though the library had no staff onsite.

Feedback from customers was mostly positive. There was some feedback about the noise level. However, this was expected as the first opening day usually drew larger than usual crowds.

The NLB is tracking the effectiveness of this library. So far, usage has been very encouraging, and enquiries from the library are still comparable to other similar libraries in the system.

### The Future

The Totally DIY library is an interesting and exciting prototype for the NLB. While the NLB does not intend to implement this concept in every one of its 22 libraries, it is planning to implement it in a few other libraries in shopping malls to reduce the operating costs, and more importantly, to extend opening hours where there is a need. In fact, the reason for prototyping this new concept is to enable the

NLB to open longer hours into the night (say, up to mid-night on certain days) if we need to, in order to be accessible to customers who are not able to visit us during our current opening hours. The current hours at our shopping mall libraries are from 11 am to between 8 and 9 pm everyday of the week.

As for the Cybrarian service, we would like to extend this as a service that can be provided anywhere round the island, and in time to come, anywhere outside Singapore, where there is demand. This service would allow our customers to reach us from anywhere without visiting our physical library, yet be guided in their search for information, online and in real-time. It will also allow our librarians to work from home or from anywhere, so long as they have connections to NLB resources.

The initial success of the prototype gives us the confidence to move further in this journey to bring library services to more people in a more accessible manner. There is a lot more to do, we realize, and we will continue to explore other ways to make the access of information to our customers a hassle-free, fun and enriching experience.

The current project that we are working on is to find an easy way to direct our customers from the online catalogue to the bookshelf where the library item is shelved, so as to reduce time taken by the customer to find the item when he is using our collections. This, we hope, will increase the satisfaction of our customers when using our services.

We will continue to explore new possibilities, including using digital media, to reach our customers, and for our customers to reach us.

*This paper was presented on the IFLA conference in Berlin 2003.*

### The Cybrarian Kiosk



Customer using the service, interacting with the offsite librarian using the telephone and co-browsing screen.