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John Harvard Library – Cafe, journals, new books and short stay computers
Gavin Jackson / arcaidimages.com

AMA is expert in the creation of new and improved environments for workplaces and places for learning. Using evidence-based design, we have refined the art of shaping future environments to meet new and emerging needs. In this edition of *AMA Nexus*, we focus on some recent projects that transform libraries.

Brief critical to project success

National, academic and public libraries are addressing evolving IT, knowledge management and social resources, and responding to restricted budgets. Project briefing to ensure the right design is now more important than ever.

At the heart of good architecture sits a good brief. AMA specialises in capturing the client's brief—especially in times of change, when defining the right vision and detailed requirements presents new challenges. In addition to library design projects described in this issue of *AMA Nexus*, we have recently helped another National Library to create a brief suitable to select and inform their architect. We are currently working with academic libraries, as well as playing a role in the briefing for a Local Authority that is embarking on a new merging of customer service with public library premises.

National Library of Greece

Staff and visitor experience highlighted during AMA's work as library consultant to Renzo Piano's design team

AMA recently joined the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC) project team in Athens, to celebrate the official unveiling of Renzo Piano's detailed architectural proposals. Funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation to enhance the lives of Greek citizens and visitors, the SNFCC will house the National Library of Greece, Greek National Opera and Stavros Niarchos Park on land adjacent to the site of the 2004 Olympic Games. Greece's first LEED-Platinum building, the SNFCC is scheduled for completion in 2015.

Replacing the 1832 National Library, the National Library of Greece will provide state of the art space to accommodate the library collection, serving the research community. It will also offer an entirely new public library with special areas for adults, teenagers and children, business and community facilities, as well as a cafeteria and bookshop. These wider civic functions of the library are intended to help spread inspiration and enthusiasm for learning to the local population.

AMA was commissioned to support RPBW's National Library of Greece design team. During the detailed design phase, AMA worked alongside experts from the British Library to ensure that relevant experience could be effectively incorporated.

An extensive series of space data sheets, outlining requirements for the internal library spaces, was developed by AMA, who also advised on detailed interior planning and appropriate furniture, fittings and equipment. The 2015 opening will mark a significant new phase for Athens libraries.

Sheffield Hallam University Adsetts Learning Centre

Major refurbishment of popular library helps deliver upgraded services to discerning students

The Adsetts Learning Centre forms the heart of the Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) campus. Open 24 hours every day except Christmas, it contains 600,000 books and more than 1,300 study places and is accessible to the local community as well as students. Universally liked by students and almost always full, Adsetts Learning Centre was due for refurbishment after 15 years of heavy use.

SHU carried out extensive student surveys to inform their brief and, in 2009, AMA won a competition to help the University upgrade the facilities, evaluate how the learning centre functioned and develop ideas for how services could be enhanced and updated in the future.

The challenge was to provide students with the optimal mix of social learning facilities and the right acoustics to aid concentrated research. AMA's design provided numerous group work and informal areas than originally envisaged—key spaces for new learning environments



Rendering of Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center

Renzo Piano Building Workshop



Adsetts Learning Centre, study booth (l) and quick access zone (r)



Richard Bryant / arcaidimages.com

welcoming environment and to provide dedicated study and children's areas.

During its 13-month closure, the library was completely re-fitted, to make better use of space, update and add facilities and make the environment more attractive to the community. The refurbished building houses a new collection of books, CDs, DVDs and games, as well as the Local History Library, children's library, community meeting rooms and a café.

Post-occupancy evaluation revealed the project to be an enormous success. In its first six months of opening, library usage figures had more than doubled, rising from 9,000 to over 20,000 a month, and new borrowers rose 70%. The new entrance has added community presence, whilst the refreshment area enhances interaction opportunities, encouraging people to stay and meet others. The project was made possible by the award of £1.4m to Southwark Council by the Big Lottery Fund Community Libraries programme.



John Harvard Library, children's area
Richard Bryant / arcaidimages.com

to enhance the student experience. They are supplemented by presentation rooms, a critical part of training for the local users. Improving the lighting levels and the perception of light in the space also played an important part in the project. Increasing the views across spaces and adding highlights of colour further enhanced the environment.

The entrance floor was completed during Phase 1 of the project in 2010. Helpdesk facilities were extended and improved, and new worksettings were positioned in prime space that had been liberated by relocating staff. The experimental settings have proved to be hugely popular.

Construction of Phase 2 began this summer, and the final phase will be completed in 2012. These two phases will provide a range of individual and group work areas, with some quiet and silent spaces and new and repurposed furniture throughout.

This approach is transforming the environment for the students by providing simple, adaptable spaces that will be fit for the next 15 years and beyond.

John Harvard Library

Visitor data demonstrate that AMA's evidence-based design has doubled the library's visitors

The John Harvard Library refurbishment is an example of how intelligent, evidence-based design can make a profound difference to a local community. The number of adult visitors to libraries in England has fallen steadily over the last five years, according to a recent report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. However, Southwark Council has bucked this trend with the John Harvard Library refurbishment project—designed to modernise, increase usage and create a centre for the community.

Previously, the interior of the building, built in 1977, was dark; facilities such as heating, lighting, ventilation and technology needed modernising, and some spaces were subject to anti-social behaviour. In addition to updating the facilities, Southwark Council wanted the refurbishment to help create strong ties with the community by offering a safe,

“A stunning exemplar of the sort of practice we would like to see mirrored right across the country of a very welcoming environment, fantastic layout, good facilities for children and great facilities for people to learn.”

—UK Culture Minister, on the refurbished John Harvard Library

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