



A new façade and civic presence have transformed the formerly cold, foreboding library building into a vibrant, modern public resource in the center of this small city in northern New England. By extending out beyond the edge of the existing building, the new façade and the (future) urban screen symbolize the bringing of library resources and information into the public realm, a re-engagement of the library within the cultural life of the City. A

The library had become a “gap” in the fabric of the city. The dark, lifeless front of the building was the outward expression of an even less inviting interior. A long, dreary entrance ramp led to a service desk and public spaces located deep within the bowels of the building. The children’s library was located in the basement beyond the public bathrooms, frequented by transients. Tall, tightly spaced stacks obscured views, creating a sense of disquiet. Poor lighting, signage, and organization contributed to the negative public perception of the Library. Technology was outdated; public computing and meeting spaces inadequate. The only way to walk from one floor to the next was to use the firestair.

A close collaboration between the client and the architect fostered a shared vision and dedication to create a truly modern facility and a new image for the library and the City. A new curtain wall encloses the unused exterior space in front of the library, creating an immediate dialogue with the life of the sidewalk and the square across the street. The new entry sequence brings visitors to an intuitive understanding of how the library is organized. Two new communicating stairs, inserted in existing openings between the main floor, second floor, and lower floor gallery, create a visual connection between the three main levels of the library, improving legibility, spatial variety and circulation for the patrons.

The interior functions of the building were reorganized to bring the most public spaces to the front, into the public realm. A new café provides a community meeting space overlooking the square. The computing area was increased threefold. A modernized lending services area encourages self-checkout and easier interaction between staff and patrons. Children’s Services were relocated to the main floor, easily accessible from the main entrance. A new teen area with its own entrance, an enlarged and vastly improved auditorium, and five new public meeting rooms were included to address community needs. To improve visibility and reduce the need for additional staff supervision, the original 84 stacks were replaced with new 54 shelving.

In addition to serving as a marquee and building enclosure system, the upper half of the curtain wall acts as a solar chimney, passively pre-heating fresh air for the mechanical system in the winter. In Phase Two, green roofs will be installed on two of the building’s major flat roofs and a large LED screen will be integrated into the curtain wall facade, displaying ever-changing cultural content and providing



opportunities for civic events in the square.
Winner of the [2012 AIA Maine Honor Award](#) (Published in [MaineHOME+DESIGN](#))

portland public library

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