

Change is in the Air



Law Librarians Share How They Accommodate Construction and Renovation Projects at Their Libraries

by Thomas French

In the annual tradition of publications such as the *Library Journal* and the *ABA Journal*, this issue of *AALL Spectrum* highlights various building and renovation projects at law libraries across the United States and Puerto Rico — but with a twist. Rather than display pretty, professional photographs with columns of statistics, our colleagues illustrate the trials and tribulations they experienced during construction at their facilities. The authors describe what they tried to accomplish; some of the problems encountered; and what their fellow librarians saw as successful, unique or interesting about the building projects.

Usually articles about library buildings center on the perspectives of designers and architects. Though these articles are interesting and accurate, they often fail to recognize the agony of the construction project to concentrate on the thrill of the finish. Occasionally these glamour pieces lose sight that librarians devote long hours to construction projects beginning with convincing the “powers that be” of the necessity of the project, through the planning, design and construction phases. When the architects and the contractors have gone home, it is the librarians and their patrons who must work in these buildings.

This special section of *AALL Spectrum* is not intended to present an *Architectural Digest* clone for the readers, but rather an insider’s appraisal of the projects described. All of us who have engaged in construction projects have unique perspectives on how and why our projects turned out the way they did. We understand what it took to finish our projects, and realize that — whatever it was we wanted to accomplish with our buildings — financial and other constraints often led to challenges and compromises.

The projects described here are not representative of all buildings completed during the last decade; they are only descriptions of individual buildings. General conclusions about the current state of library architecture are not presented here; however, careful reading of these descriptions will show that building and renovation projects are undertaken to meet various needs of individual institutions, each with its own unique set of challenges.

Phyllis Marion’s article examines how her library in San Diego dealt with the problems of inadequate space and technology to meet the library’s current and future needs. David Voisinnet discusses the major overhaul of a court library in upstate New York. Kit Hartnett describes how her law firm’s virtual library fared when it relocated to the basement — and away from the attorney’s main offices. William Wells Jr. details the aesthetic challenges of adding a traditional four-wall building to the circular main library at the University of Maine. Patti Monk and Judy Morgan explore the ongoing technology changes at the Oklahoma City University Law Library. Thomas French relays the litany of complications that plagued the University of North Carolina law library’s four-year renovation and expansion. P. Michael Whipple discusses the challenges of expanding and renovating the University of Puerto Rico’s Law Library without offending the integrity of the original architect’s design.



photo credit: Patrick Sauter

Syracuse University

Thomas French, law library director and associate professor of law at Syracuse University (above), coordinated this special section on constructing and renovating library facilities.