

Projects

PROJECT OF THE WEEK

Stars Align for Honoring the Denver Public Library

AIA, American Library Association admire human-scale details in a grand-scale building

by Stephanie Stubbs, Assoc. AIA



Its architect, Michael Graves, FAIA, is this year's AIA Gold Medalist. Its city, Denver, is this year's host for the AIA's national convention. It just received a 2001 AIA/American Library Association Design Award. Coincidence? We don't think so!


The Denver Public Library, in fact, garnered an AIA Honor Award for Interior Design for Graves & Associates and associate architect Klipps Colussy Jenks DuBois Architects two years ago. Now, though, it has an extended track record of serving its constituency of 500,000 people, who enjoy one of the largest public library collections in the U.S.

The project consisted of renovation and addition work that tripled the existing 1956 library's square footage to 400,000 square feet in seven stories. Varied exterior heights, forms, colors, materials, and fenestrations break up the huge exterior volume into palatable pieces, most notably the tubular rotunda with its immense copper-truss cap. The AIA/ALA jury also was



taken with its interior variety as well. "There are a variety of spaces—larger spaces and more intimate ones—that patrons can discover," the jury stated. "It is a playful, entertaining building—not at all staid and formal—a building that invites you in."

Inside, the gallery spine creates a strong orientation for library patrons, accentuated by a three-story-tall vaulted Great Hall that is the building's central public space. Throughout the project are attentive details and strong relation to human scale that exemplify the architects' desire to "deinstitutionalize" a very large public structure. "The architects have designed a functional, beautiful building; they have met and overcome many challenges," the library's directors wrote in their nominating statement. "We handed the design team an ambitious building program, an unusual architect selection process, a site constricted by the existing building, contaminated soil, a many-headed public client, and a tight budget. They came through on all accounts."

The Denver Public Library, as well as the seven other AIA/ALA Design Award winners (see above) will be honored in a ceremony at the annual ALA conference in San Francisco in June. 

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