

Bolles + Wilson, City Library Münster, Münster, Germany, 1993

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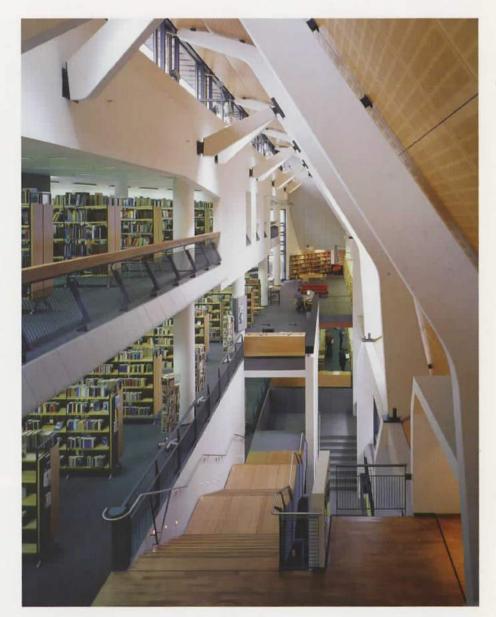
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aesthetic derived from designing from the inside out, but is also a prime example of the new sociability of public libraries. (Admittedly, it is a sociability driven as much by the firm's commitment to the citizens of Münster as the anxiety about the comprehensiveness of the library in an age of mass-market bookstores). Australian Peter Wilson and his partner Julia Bolles, a native of Münster, where the firm is based, looked at the activities the library would support and came up with two distinct spaces, linked above and below ground, that declare the library's split personality. A long rectangular slab-unself-consciously celebrated as a supermarket of information-houses the library's café, auditorium, and two-story newspaper reading room. A curved structure-a fragment of the archetypal circleserves the more traditional library function, with stacks interspersed among quiet reading areas.

Both wings are sky-lit, their ceilings partially encased by massive ribs of white laminated timber that support warm wood acoustic panels. The massive scale established by the structural elements is mitigated by windows sized for individual views. Another indication of their commitment to provide personal space in a communal environment is the fact that the architects never lost sight of the relation of furniture to room. The place of the reader was always carefully considered, as evidenced by the deep windowsill seating niches and multiple intimate spaces. Bolles and Wilson also recognized that the reader is now also a listener, a viewer, even a flâneur enjoying the scene; accordingly, they introduced customized furniture, such as the whimsical wheeled newspaper "wagons" and the "vehicles" in the Mediathek that allow visitors to listen to tapes, as if they were sitting on carnival floats.

In his 1974 book *A History of Building Types*, Nikolaus Pevsner notes that the original library was first a piece of furniture—the book cupboard—and only later a building.¹⁹ Where Bolles and Wilson play with the relationship between the two, Will Bruder's Phoenix Central Library (1995) in Phoenix, Arizona, conflates them entirely. Based on a simple orthogonal grid made up of square bays based on library stack modules, the library is colloquially referred to as "saddlebags for books." Bruder's functionally driven design quickly became a national icon and brought new attention to the cultural and design potential of civic libraries in the



Will Bruder Architects, Phoenix Central Library, Phoenix, 2004

Felipe Assadi, Park Theater, Santiago, 2004



United States. (Its impact as an urban icon can be seen in the major commissions that followed, among them Moshe Safdie's Salt Lake City Public Library and Rem Koolhaas's Seattle Central Library, the latter of which is discussed later in this chapter.) The biggest innovation that Bruder brought to the library's interior is its exposure to light and landscape-a resonant factor in a Western state that prides itself on wide-open spaces, and a practical benefit to the readers dispersed throughout the building's 280,000 square feet (26,012 square meters). The library is literally book-ended in glass: The south wall is outfitted with automated solar tracking devices to minimize heat gain and glare; the north wall is shielded by "shade sails" to optimize views in the face of summer sun. Designed for display as well as protection, the glass facades proudly showcase the library's books and its patrons to the community. The concern for natural light and sightlines was not confined to the building's edges, however. To insure that daylight reached the heart of the library, Bruder situated a five-story light well at its center. Within this monumental atrium, automated sun-tracking skylights ration acceptable amounts of natural light into the interior. Paired with a sequence of tapered concrete columns, the skylights helpfully orient visitors as they thread their way through the spatial grid. The attention to lighting is even carried through to the yellow reading lamps of the architect's own design. Beyond providing additional artificial illumination, the lamps also create a pattern of horizontal slashes that brightly punctuate the cavernous space of the Great Reading Room.





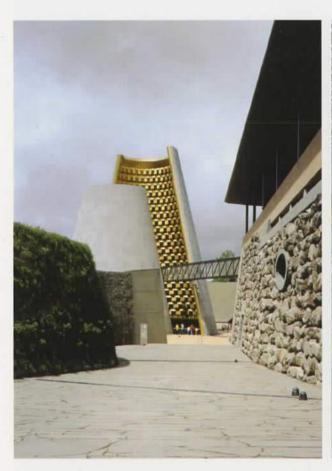
staircases eloquently make the point that looking is a constant experience, not a compartmentalized action cued by exhibition signage. The designers also used the stairs (they even included a redundant set) to offer as much variety as possible within the museum's extremely narrow confines—the five-story-tall building is only 40 feet (12 meters) wide. Apart from creating an intimate scale, the most masterful aspect of the design's relation to its program is the intentionally ad hoc quality of the materials used. An eclectic combination of corrugated green fiberglass, rough and smooth stone, plaster, wood, and steel complements but in no way imitates the folk art on display. What makes the collage-like mix of materials cohere is the one element that's immaterial: light. A sky-lit well descends through the core, subtly unifying the space and drawing attention simultaneously upward and downward.

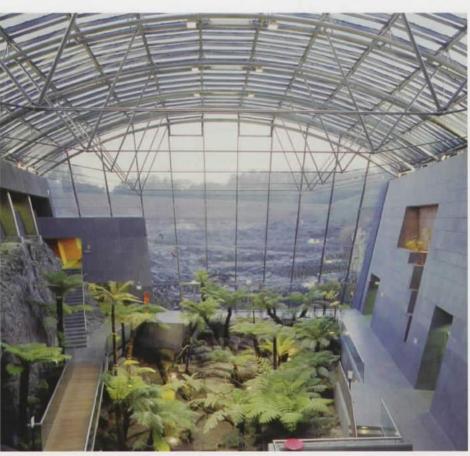
Hans Hollein's Vulcania (2002) in Auvergne, France-a science museum dedicated to the study of geology and volcanoes-also creates a potent system of vertical movement, though here the designer's intention is more explicit. Hollein created an architecture parlante that leads visitors on an imaginary journey to the center of the earth. This largely underground museum, built with local volcanic rock and red Jura stone, is announced by a 1,220-foot-high (372-meterhigh) bifurcated entry cone lined with embossed, gold-tinted, titanium-clad stainless steel. Visitors progress through spaces cut into the sloping site as they make their Danteesque descent into a massive manmade crater that is 100 feet deep and wide (30 meters deep and wide). This roughhewn grotto, studded with structural bolts and rivets, bears the scars of the drilling and blasting that formed it and the labyrinth of Piranesian galleries below. The rawness of the walls is further accentuated by the presence of pristine stone columns and state-of-the-art exhibitions. By literally excavating the museum's interior from bedrock, Hollein . speaks to both the reality and the metaphysics of a subterranean passage.

The notion of geological passage also defines Will Bruder's design for the Nevada Museum of Art (2002) in Reno. Here the journey is concentrated in the core of a four-story atrium, in which the dominant feature is a dark metal staircase. Under the black ceiling around the skylight, the vertiginous risers suggest a hike through Nevada's Black Rock Desert,

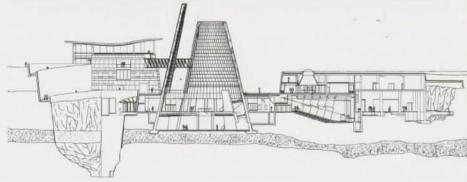








the controlling metaphor for the building. In this environment, brilliant white walls lose their customary neutrality and become a stark evocation of the intensity of desert light. Illumination from a skylight above the atrium is filtered through slender glazed rectangular incisions in the atrium walls and magnified and refracted with prismatic effect. The elegant fenestration affords teasing glimpses from the stairwell of the painting and sculpture galleries without disrupting the seamless verticality of the central court. Only the powerful thrusts of the stairway enunciate the museum's various levels. Here, the act of passage is less connected to the artistic program of the museum than to the program of architecture itself, specifically the critical regionalism espoused by architectural historian Kenneth Frampton, who in the mid-1990s made the case for mitigating the sometimes characterless austerity of modernism using abstracted references to place and region. As such, the Nevada museum serves as a transition in this chapter to spaces that assert their identity independent of and often in counterpoint to their contents.









Foreground: The Pro-Active Space

When a designer provokes a confrontation in a cultural context, it is to insure the autonomy of two enterprisesarchitecture and art-instead of subordinating one to the other. What may appear to be radical tactics today, in fact, are often part of a long tradition. One can look as far back as 1942, when Frederick Kiesler curved the walls of Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery to release the artworks from what he considered to be their bourgeois ballast, the passive flat surfaces of a mere container. Frank Lloyd Wright famously followed suit seventeen years later when his Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum opened on Fifth Avenue. These were designs as propositions, arguments for a new relationship between objects and events in space. Today, similarly risky design is enjoying. unprecedented levels of patronage as communities look for ways to differentiate themselves within the monotony of globalism and its interchangeable architectures. What was once considered visionary and marginal has now moved to center stage.

In 1987, Rem Koolhaas made his professional debut with a design for the Netherlands Dance Theatre that could quite literally be considered an act of internal rebellion. Part of the Spui Complex in the center of The Hague, the theater shares a common foyer with an adjacent concert hall but adamantly refuses to be absorbed by it. An intense red wall stakes out the territory of the theater like a warning flare. A balcony boomerangs over the lobby, its mass supported by columns, painted in De Stijl colors, that appear to float under their load. Suspended above the balcony, as though balanced on a trapeze, is the oval disk of the refreshment bar. As extroverted as the theater's public spaces are, its auditorium is relatively tame; its warped corrugated-steel roof and gold-rubbed wood acoustic wall panels give just a hint of the design idea that would come to fruition almost two decades later in Portugal in Koolhaas's Casa da Música.

Set in the small city of Oporto, the Casa da Música (2005) is the work of a mature architect. Like the Netherlands Dance Theatre, Casa da Música accords the deepest respect for the central stage, but here the experience of reaching the stage

