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inspiring commercial design solutions september 2007

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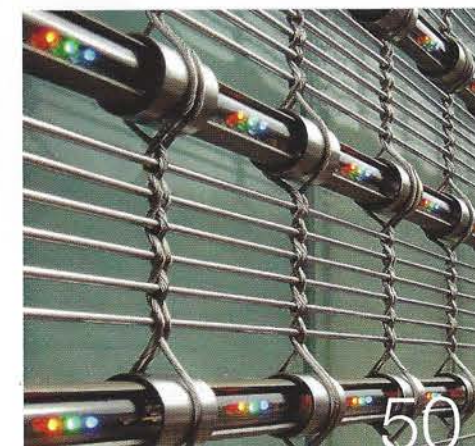
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cover: Hercules Public Library, designed by HGA Architects and Engineers and Will Bruder + Partners. Photography by Bill Timmerman. Page 78.

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long overdue

Formerly one of two Californian cities without a public library, Hercules starts a new chapter with a design by HGA Architects and Engineers and Will Bruder + Partners

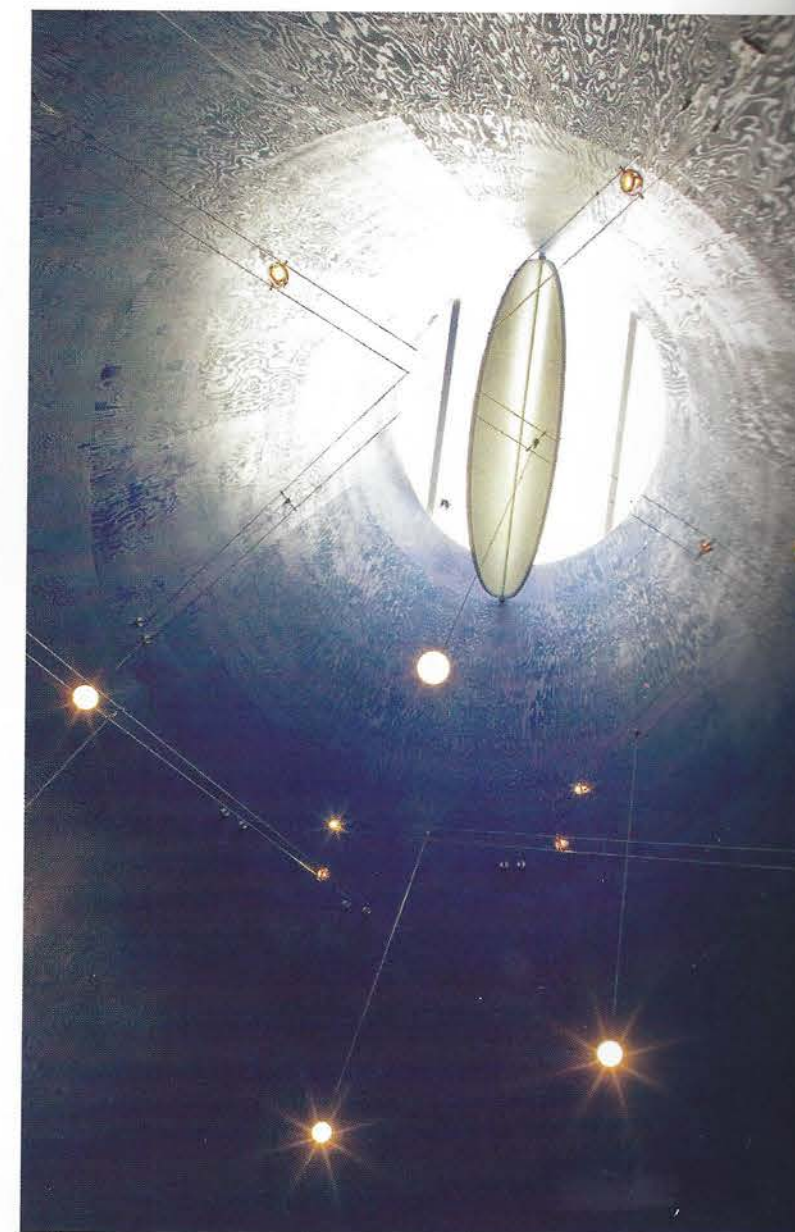
By Katie Weeks
Photography by Bill Timmerman

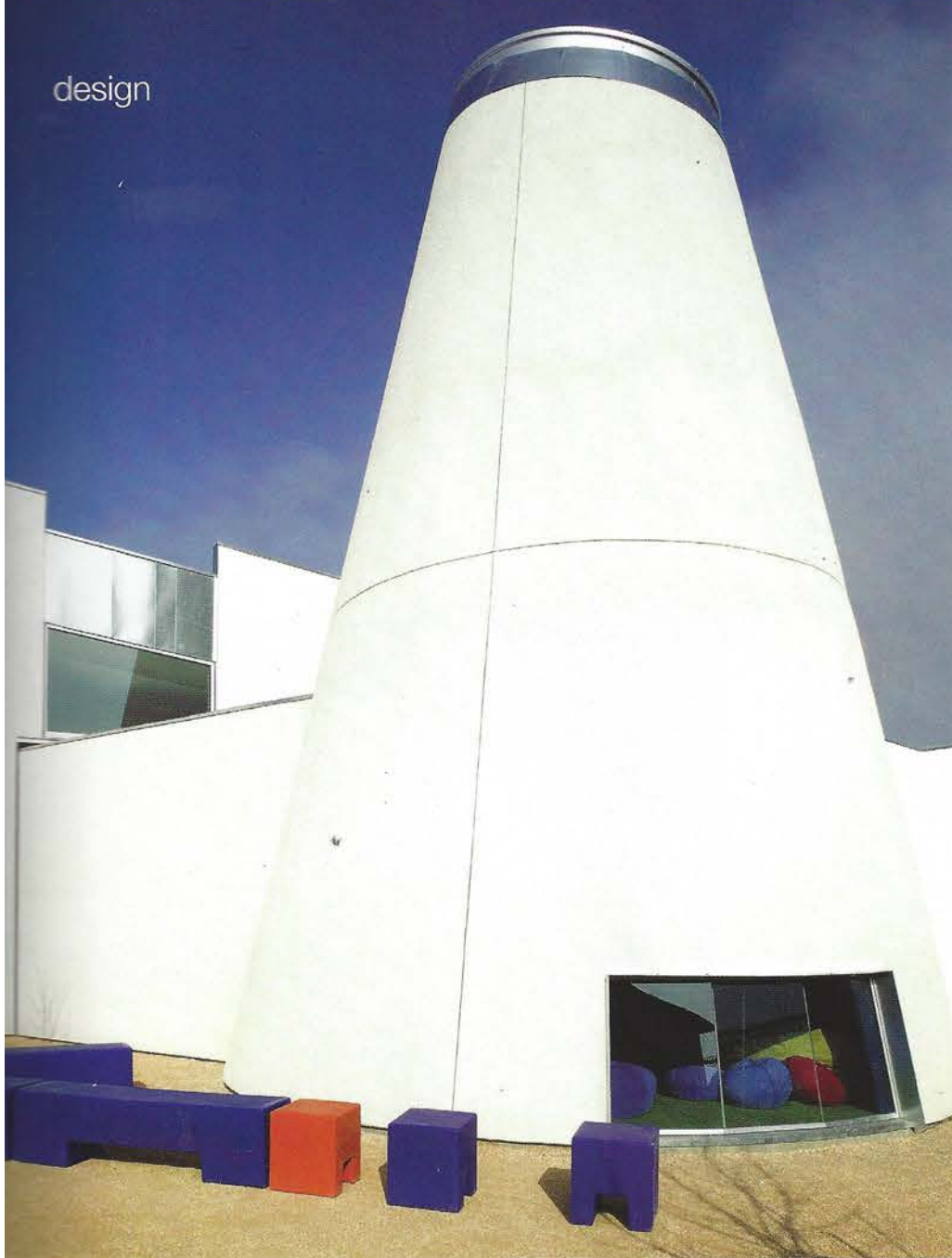
Usually in most stories, the excitement of a stampeding crowd is contained within the words on a page (unless, of course, the crowd is gathered for the release of a Harry Potter novel). Yet a stampede-like reaction was the scene when the Hercules Public Library in Hercules, Calif., debuted in March 2007. In this case, however, the standing-room-only crowd was gathered to celebrate a different sort of debut—that of the destination itself. Given the stunning design of the \$10.4-million facility in this small town 25 miles north of San Francisco that was crafted by HGA Architects and Engineers in association with Will Bruder + Partners, it's easy to see the source of excitement.

A bedroom community that is home to about 20,000 people, Hercules became incorporated as a city in 1900, yet at the start of the 21st century, the municipality remained one of only two cities in California without a public library. That changed in 2000, however, with a state bond funding public library construction.

In designing the 21,500-sq.-ft. facility, the designers sought to create not just a physical home for an 800,000-book and periodical collection, but also to offer a living room for the community. "Hercules is very suburban and doesn't have a traditional downtown, so the city council really wanted to make a statement," says Liz Warmerdam, project manager at Hercules Public Library. "We wanted it to be something out of the ordinary and spectacular." No short order, however the designers were prepared. "Most public libraries are becoming *de facto* community centers for many small towns across America," notes Frederick Sherman, AIA, principal in charge of HGA's San Francisco office. What's more, Will Bruder adds, "This building really made them a community. The challenge was to create an architecture of optimism that was about ideas beyond the written program and pragmatic needs of the community. Hopefully, we choreographed a stage set that complements all of the greater abstract aspirations of the community rather than just how many volumes or computer terminals the building would hold."

Designing the Hercules Public Library to meet the city residents' needs meant including spaces for even the smallest patrons: The children's story cone (opposite) keeps windows and seating on a kid scale at ground level, only to soar up to an oculus letting in the California sun (right).





Mirroring the diversity found in Hercules' population, the library's design is a subtle mix of eastern and western influences. Taking cues from old California missions, the exterior massing communicates with an angular, city hall-like building across the street, but also is crafted to embrace an elliptical sky garden in the center of the library, which was inspired by Japanese meditation gardens. On a more local level, the dynamic brick façade is reminiscent of the old headquarters of California Powder Works, a manufacturer that produced the Hercules brand of dynamite for which the city was named.

Inside, the connection to the community continues. One specific element that was developed out of meetings with townspeople is a wall dedicated to showcasing the history of Hercules. "The community loves the cultural wall and having an exhibit wall to put up various things to remember the city's past, ethnicity, and future," says Sherman. To further emphasize a sense of personalization, the interiors are filled with a variety of seating. "It was about coming into the library with a multiplicity of seating so that everyone can find those two or three chairs that they feel were made for their body—those chairs they totally engage with and are comfortable with. Just like everyone in the building is wearing different clothes, the interiors acknowledges it," says Bruder.

In addition to standard sections for books and periodicals, the library also contains a teen homework center, a café, a reading area with fireside seating, and three conference rooms. The sky garden, encased by large windows and centered around a magnolia tree, anchors the interiors, providing views as well as abundant natural light. However, realizing this concept required planting a seed within the minds of county administrators that the space would be more than a design whim. "Getting the courtyard built was a challenge as the library commission in Sacramento was worried it would be a maintenance and security issue," recalls Sherman. But arguments from locals in favor



The interiors curve around a central sky garden that is anchored by a magnolia tree (opposite bottom). Larger continuous windows bring in abundant natural light to all spaces, including the adult reading areas (above) and a small work room (right). The curves are continued on the children's story cone (opposite top).

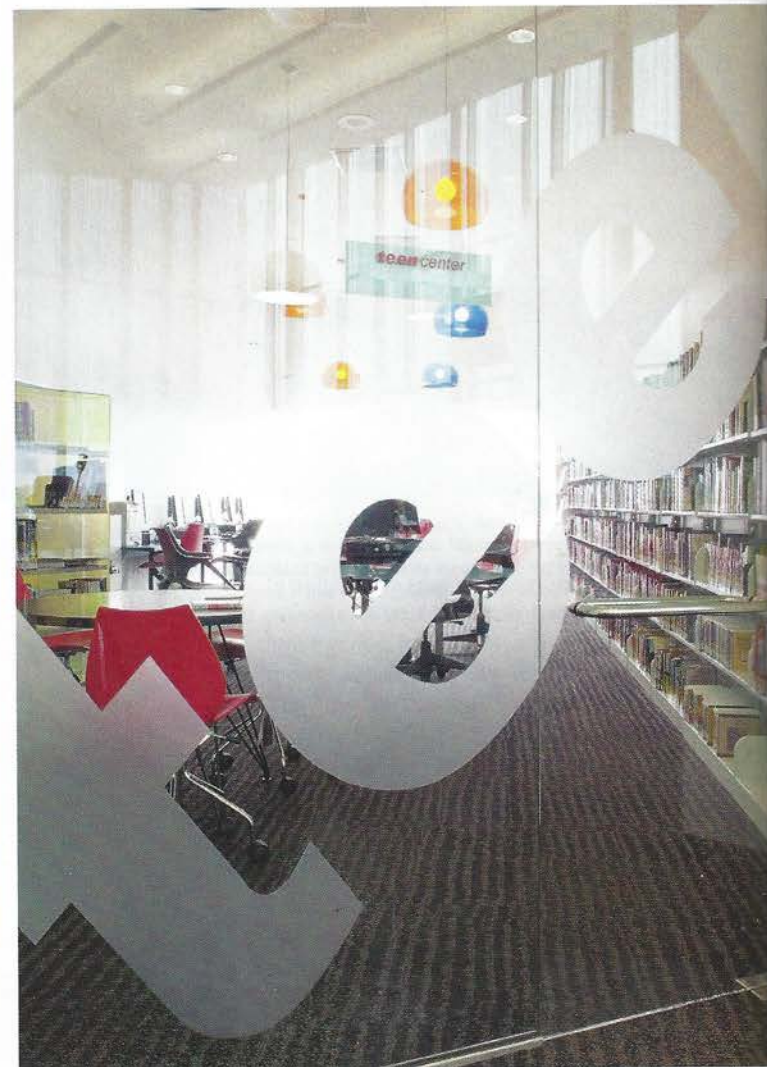


of the garden helped prove "it wasn't just an architect trying to do something. These people wanted it badly and fought for it verbally."

Rising up into the sky is another defining element, the children's story cone. Conceived by Bruder as an homage to Bay Area architect Bernard Maybeck, the conical form is designed to capture a sense of playfulness. The blue interior funnels up past lighting, hung like planets in the sky, to an oculus that lets in the sun. The seating options and low-to-the-ground window placement are purposely scaled to a child's perspective. "You operate in that room as a child first," Bruder says.

"Going to the library is an experience now, and that's what this building is all about," says Sherman. According to Warmerdam, child and adult visitors alike are reveling in their time spent in the new space. "On opening day we literally came close to a stampede to get in," she says, noting that public pride in the building has continued. However, Hercules residents aren't the only ones celebrating. Says Bruder: "It's become a point of pride to the community and that gives you so much gratification as an architect when you are able to cross that line." ■

The brick-and-glass facade (opposite) is an historical reference to the headquarters of California Powder Works, which produced Hercules dynamite. Inside, the design provides modern spaces including a teen center (bottom right) and a wide range of individual work and reading areas (below left).



who

Project: Hercules Public Library. **Client:** City of Hercules. **Architect, interior designer:** HGA Architects, Will Bruder and Partners. **Structural engineer:** Umerani Associates. **Mechanical/electrical engineer:** Glumac. **General contractor:** Turner Construction. **Lighting designer:** HGA Architects. **Landscape architect:** CMG. **Photographer:** Bill Timmerman.

what

Paint: Dunn Edwards. **Laminate:** Abet Laminati, Formica. **Flooring:** polished concrete. **Carpet/carpet tile:** Shaw. **Ceiling:** Armstrong. **Lighting:** Elliptipar, Erco, Zumtobel, Metalux, Artemide, Cooper Lighting. **Doors:** Marshfield. **Glass:** Singapore Safety Glass. **Curtain wall:** Vista Wall. **Window treatments:** Maharam, MechoShade. **Library seating:** ICF. **Library tables:** Vecta, Leland. **Conference seating:** Keilhauer. **Conference tables:** Accademia. **Administrative desks and seating, files:** Herman Miller. **Lounge seating:** Brayton, Morosso, Easy Bean, Geiger. **Meeting room seating:** Stylex. **Meeting room tables:** Nevins. **Upholstery:** Maharam, Designtex, Luna, Textus, Textile Mania. **Children's seating:** Danko Pershing. **Children's tables:** Artek. **Technology seating:** Kartell, Vecta. **Occasional tables:** Nienkamper, Brayton. **Online catalogs:** Fantoni. **Shelving:** Estey. **End panels:** Ross McDonald. **Architectural woodworking:** ISEC. **Planters, accessories:** Custom shelving, fireplace, signage: Will Bruder + Partners. **Plumbing fixtures:** American Standard, Crane, Elkay.

where

Location: Hercules, Calif. **Total floor area:** 20,162 sq. ft. **No. of floors:** 1. **Book capacity (in volumes):** 800,000. **Seating capacity:** 275.

