

Beyond Library

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The mere thought of designing a library project comparable to three main institutional libraries in the world that is the British Library in London, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, is overwhelming.

However, the changes in the electronic technology since the past thirty years have imposed greater challenge in 21st century library design. The library is no longer a repository for printed materials. It now embarks on the revolutionary world of miniaturisation and the day to day running of the library is based upon computer technology.

Prior to the design exercise, students had the opportunity to visit Ken Yeang's National Library in Singapore, Norman Foster's Library at Universiti Petronas in Perak and the two conventional libraries in Kuala Lumpur namely the National Library (Jalan Tun Razak) and Kuala Lumpur City library (Jalan Raja).

The 2.26 acres site for the proposed library project is situated in a dynamic urban enclave between Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (TAR) and Jalan Dang Wangi. Jalan TAR formerly known as Batu Road, is a prominent road in Kuala Lumpur with a colourful history of cultural background. The whole stretch of road is a testament of past, present and future of Kuala Lumpur. It represents the progression of Kuala Lumpur's rapid infrastructure development. A project of this nature is expected to be monumental.

The site has an existing Art Deco building formerly known as the Odeon Cinema. Students are required to retain this building as part of their library complex.

The main objective of the project is to develop a complex architectural design within an urban setting. Students were challenged to interpret issues related to urban design guidelines and integrate them into the project's social and cultural context.

The site should encourage general public to at least visit the library at their own leisure. For the serious library users, the problem of accessibility should be minimal. Furthermore, it is close to pedestrian traffic and public transport. The physical impact of the proposed library and its landscape must be significant as it can be viewed from a distance along Jalan TAR. Students need to consider the impact of the building on its surroundings in terms of size, architectural style and construction approach.

Since Kuala Lumpur already has two conventional libraries, students are encouraged to select a specific topic and consider designing a specialised library or bibliotheque. Eleven students are divided into four groups and worked together as a team during the precedent study and data collection stage. Upon completion of the site analysis, each student then worked on his/her own selected specialised library.

CULTURAL BIBLIOTHEQUE. The precedent study was conducted by Norlia, Soon H F and Yow C S. This particular library with multi-functional space acts as a learning centre for the public in general and encourages public participation. Their designs allow for flexibility and present the dynamism of Malaysian rich culture. The library is created with a strong cultural presence which is linked to the historical Odeon Cinema building.

MEDIA AND COMMERCE CENTRE. The precedent study was conducted by M Khairi and M Nazri. For the media and commerce centre design group, students argued that most library designs in Malaysia focus mainly on the building forms. Their concept proposal is to utilise the entire landscape and the building exterior envelope as a medium in knowledge delivery. Knowledge and learning is no longer being restricted within a building but spread out throughout the landscape and architecture.

PERFORMING ARTS LIBRARY. The precedent study was conducted by Hanafi, Phung K S and Siah P L. This group aims to enhance Kuala Lumpur's position as an artistic vibrant city through promotions of contemporary art and arts education for the whole community. The design for the performing arts library not only serves as an extensive research centre but a place of congregation for group engagements where discoveries of creative potentials in dances, music, films and theatre happen. The students strongly believed that a contemporary building setting would certainly stimulate a new method of learning which involves experimentation for inspiration as well as aspiration.

FASHION AND TEXTILE LIBRARY. The precedent study was conducted by Nor Izyan, Too Y Y and Yuslizza. Apart from focusing on printed materials (books) and provision of resources, the textile and fashion library is a hub for social interaction that includes indoor and outdoor recreational space. Works of famous fashion designers such as Jimmy Choo, Bernard Chandran, Akmal Hafiz, Zang Toi, etc. will be exhibited here to create awareness and appreciation on artistic merits and the cultural importance of Malaysian textiles and fashion. This will be the centre where users can share ideas, exchange information and further develop the textile and fashion industry professionally.

All the above proposed libraries will serve as the information and reference centre for professional associations, non-governmental bodies, societies and general public at large. Thus/Hence, aspects on safety and security are of prime concern.

In conclusion, the students' approach in designing these four types of libraries is totally different from the conventional library. They strongly believed that a future library should serve not just as a mono-functional library in the classical sense. Their designs allow for maximum flexibility and enable the public to engage in all sorts of activities once inside the main building.

Apart from meeting the library requirements per se, students have successfully looked into the adaptive reuse of the historical Odeon cinema. They not only demonstrated the understanding of complex architectural design within a constrained site but also managed to exhibit technical competency, knowledge and understanding of the sustainable design principles and strategies. The use of daylighting in reading areas, low energy light fittings and avoidance of massive glazing on the western façade are some of the green building issues that are often emphasised in all their library designs.

The diversity of urbanscape and the development of the surrounding areas close to the site are enriched with the insertion of a contemporary building form. This certainly transcends and transforms the architecture especially along Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman.