

Abstract held that
drew five entries and
was



Abstract

The largest library in Midwest is Harold Washington Library Centre that confirms to both traditional and postmodern elements of designing. The building is a neat amalgamation of traditional motifs from mythology and culture of Chicago and Midwest as well as postmodern architectural styles. The building is different in its construction and design from its contemporary library buildings due to its incorporation of both designing and not just that of functionality as is done in most modern buildings. This paper discusses architectural design of the building in detail.

The libraries being built in the 21st century are, according to Terry Webb, “more than just a repository of information and knowledge, and epitomizes a higher aspiration that is fundamental to civilization and its persistence.” (Webb 5) In other words, modern day library construction is moving beyond just technical requirements of construction. Traditionally architectural designs of libraries had entirely reflected upon the practicality and functionality aspect of the building, completely doing away with the designing aesthetics. Therefore, such public buildings have been designed with “preeminence of function and significance in a construction virtually devoid of pleasing form.” (Webb 7) Library designing is essentially designing of the interior space area such that there is a distinct reading area, circulation area, stacks area, etc. It has also been suggested that the simplest and most efficient shape for a library building is a rectangle (Webb 7).

Classical architecture of libraries usually has a fortress like appearance with heavy bronze doors and small often-barred windows (Webb 8). However, this has changed considerably with the advent of the modern libraries built in the 21st century. Libraries today has become more post modern in their orientation, with a lot of stress being put on the aesthetics of designing than simply catering to the functional requirements of the building. This paper discusses the background and building of one such example of modern day library. It is the Harold Washington Library Centre (HWLC) at Chicago built in 1990-2 is the main library of the Chicago Public Library (Watkin 682). The paper first provides a brief description of the background of the location and culture surrounding the building. Then provide an understanding of how it was built and in the end understand how it would have been built had it been built today.

This paper presents a detailed architectural review of the modern library and its importance to architecture. HWLC is a monumental building and was commissioned as a part of the renewal of the urban landscape of the city. The designer of the building was Thomas Beeby of Hammod, Beeby, and Babka (Watkin 682). After refurbishing the Chicago Cultural Center in 1977, it was found that the building was outgrowing its collection (Becker). Then pursued a long debate on the contraction of a new library building in the city but was derailed due to lack of funding.

Ultimately, in 1983, the then mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington, supported the construction of a new central library (Duff 91). Then in 1988 a designing competition was held that drew five entries and was eventually shortlisted to two designs - that of Hammond, Beeby, and Babka, and

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Helmut Jahn's (Plootnik 565). The later was not selected because the design was consider too expensive a project. Figure 1: Harold Washington Library, Chicago (Harold Washington Library) In 1986, Harold Washington offered two square blocks for the construction of the library (Duff 91). The designing of the library was done under a lot of enthusiasm of the city dwellers for construction of a well-designed building. The designing competition was conducted under the specification that the construction of the project should not exceed \$144 million and the area under construction should be 700, 000 square feet. The construction of the project began with funding from the state and private funding, the construction of the library began that covered an entire block. It is the largest public library in the world and is named after the mayor who supported its initiation, Harold Washington (Watkin 682).

The library is located at the south end of Chicago loop (Watkin 682). It was built in 1991 and \$195 million was spent in its construction (Knox and Belcher 62). The building is approximately of 750, 000 square feet (Watkin 683).

The next section of the paper presents the culture that prevailed during the construction of the library. The building exemplifies the words of its pioneering initiator Harold Washington: " With the same adventurous spirit of Jean Baptist DuSable when he founded Chicago, we are going to do some great things together." (Duff 91) Chicago city has a rich tradition in urban architectural landscaping. When the city was almost destroyed in the 1871 Great Chicago Fire, the city was rebuilt with the help and inspiration of architects like William LeBaron Jenney, John Wellborn Root, Louise Sullivan,

and so on (Duff 91). The city has a rich architectural heritage and the HWLC is yet another addition to it.

Basic information available regarding the construction of HWLC is as follows: SEBUS group designed the building and its construction was finished in 1991. The size of the building is 756, 640 square feet and the cost of construction was \$144 million. There are 2337 readers' seats available in the library and 70.

85 mile shelving space. The library houses 2, 000, 000 books and 8, 585 periodicals. The building is built in 10 storeys and at the top has an intriguing winter garden. The building is essentially a postmodern architecture with an equal blend of Chicago's traditional architectural heritage and modern architecture. The building is highly functional and has a space of 520, 000 square feet without the winter garden (Plootnik 565).

The building is located in the Loop area of Chicago that has a skyscraper clad urban landscape. It houses some of the most famous architectural works as well as works of outdoor art like that of Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, etc. This area is culturally rich with the art and music school of Chicago located in the area.

The next section enumerates on the exterior and interior designing of the exterior and interior of the building. The building is a blend of contemporary and old architectural elements. The exterior design of the library is presumably inspired from other Chicago landmark buildings like the Rookery, Monadnock buildings, and Auditorium in the Loop neighborhood (Duff 92). The bottom of the building is made of granite blocks and it has large arched

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doorways. The windows are set in natural bronze frames (Duff 92). The ornamental base is similar to that of the Auditorium Building in Chicago. The maximum of the exterior is made with red brick. The prevalence of use of granite at the bottom of the building and use of red brick for exterior walls is representative of the Beaux-Art style of the nineteenth century.

Further adaptation from this style is heavy use of adornment of the exterior walls and dominant axial symmetry (Schulze and Harrington). The main aim of the designers was to make the building similar to the grand civic buildings of the classical western civilizations. That is why the building has a monumental presence in the city. The arched windows are five storey tall breaks the monotonies of the red brick walls. They break the walls on three sides of the building. The windows are linked with cast stone ornamentation (Harold Washington Library). The arched windows are similar to the work of Sullivan, Root, and Daniel Burnham on the three buildings present in the Loop that are the Auditorium building, the Rookery and the Monadnocks (Duff 92).

The flatter expanse of the red brick wall is small, rectangular windows that are linked together with cast stone ornamentations. This technique used by the designers is reminiscent of Chicago's Revival Movement. The granite bottom blocks and the brick walls were divided using wall decorations that were sculpted in the form of "Ceres and ears of corn" (Schulze and Harrington). The western facade of the library is different from that of the other three Chicago buildings.

This is due to the use of modern elements and material in its construction. On the western side of the building, facing the Plymouth, is made of glass, steel and aluminum. The pediment attic is also made of glass, aluminum and steel components enhances its modernistic look. Therefore, this sense of designing bears close resemblance to the Mannerist style (Schulze and Harrington). The western part is done with continuous glass curtain wall with dark green aluminum frames.

These ascend to the cornice and the pediment made of glass on the tenth floor. The top of the building has a cross-axial roof and is centered in the skylight for the Winter Garden (Duff 92). The roof is ornamented with numerous foliates. To these five cast metal owls each of fourteen inches painted in green would be added to match the ornamentation of the building designed by Raymond Kaskery and Kent Bloomer had designed painted aluminum acroteria. The acroteria on the Congress Parkway shows seedpods signifying natural bounty of the Midwest. Owl is used in the ornamentation of the building top, as it is the Greek mythological symbol of knowledge. The figures shows the owls perched in the acroteria foliage. The ornamentation of the library is truly used as a revival can vas for the history in the building.

The designer wanted to revive the classical architectural history of Chicago as well as blend in the aesthetics of postmodern architecture. The iconography used in the buildings represents Midwest and Chicago. The “ head of Ceres” who is the “ roman goddess of grain” are present in the medallion on the wall along with “ ears of corn” that represent prairie type of agriculture prevalent in Midwest (Schulze and Harrington). The “ cornice railing” on the ninth floor of the building that marks the uniformity of the

building heights as proposed in the 1909 “ Plan of Chicago” by Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett (Schulze and Harrington).

Further, it also has the Windy City Man installation high on the facade that is self-explanatory in its significance. The public door of the buildings leads the visitors to the lobby. The northern entrance leads to the lobby that has brown, orange, and pink lines to ascent the walls. The corridor leads to the south of the lobby or the Central Hall.

The Central Hall can be reached through all the three public entrances. This is similar to the classical design of a central hall. It is a three-storey hall. The hall’s floor is laden with marble and from its center, the lower laden auditorium of the library consisting of 385 sitting arrangements is available. This can be seen though the center space of the central hall. And the ceiling also has a circular open area through which the children’s library on its top is visible. The floor is stacked with large collection of artwork that are visible on the walls, floors, and ceilings of the hall. The hall also includes the mosaic Events in Life of Harold Washington by Jacob Lawrence in the floor.

The other areas of importance like the auditorium, the main exhibition hall, meeting rooms, etc. are easily accessible through the central hall. The building has a square footage area of 75000 square foot. Even though the building is huge and complex in its architectural design, visitors to the library find is least difficult to find their way around. All the floors within the building are accessible through escalators or elevators. The second floor of the buildings has the children’s library names Thomas Hughes Children’s Library. This section is the largest collection of children’s books in the Midwest.

The children's library has a size of 18, 000 square feet of space. The children's library also has a theatre for puppet shows and magic performances (Duff 92). From the third through the eighth floor are the core HWLC.

These are connected through an elevator and a centrally placed elevator. These floors hold the sections for the four subject divisions of the library. The users of the library can browse through the library collections, research, or use other services like inter-library loan, etc. these also have computer assisted references, language learning center, reading machines for blind people, and learning center for adults (Duff 92). Figure 2: Design and layout of the library, (Duff 92) The reading room of the library is monumental. The public space is done in "marble, terrazzo, bronze, and maple" to match the elegance of traditional libraries (Duff 93). The space is designed to give out the feeling of scholarly, comfortable, and relaxed atmosphere, but not overbearing. The ambience of the room is derived more out of the layout and design of the room, and due to the use of light colored raw material in construction of the interiors and the use of indirect lighting.

The furnishings in the reading room are made of natural maple wood. The plastered walls are painted in a light shade of gray that runs throughout the building. The Turkish and Italian marbles used on floors, countertops, and wainscots are mainly used in light colors. The carpeting and the terrazzo too are done in soft colors. The indirect pendant lights with light colored tiled ceilings are considered good for both reading and preservation of books. Almost all the books in the library are shelved in open stack shelves.

On the eastern part of the library, there are 50 smaller reading areas for the library users. There are ten reading rooms with ample of natural lighting from the large arched windows running along the State Street. Further, this section also has eight refurbished patron tables from the old Chicago Public Library of 1897 (Duff 93). There are one-storey alcoves that provide a quieter study area using maple carrels for the patrons. The ninth floor houses the Winter Garden that provides the most spectacular effect to the architecture of the HWLC building.

It is an atrium with lots of sun light filtering though the glass ceiling. The patrons can read or can relax in the garden. This also allows for private parties or events at night.

The garden is filled with olive trees and ivory covered walls. The administrative block of the library is on the tenth floor overlooking the garden and is attached by a bronze-railed bridge connecting the north and south halves of the building. On the north, side of the Winter Garden is the Harold Washington Archives that is led through the double doors.

On the other side of the winter garden are the colorful murals from Chicago artists. This leads to the professional section of the library with the section of science, and history. On the side of the building overlooking South Loop is the public restaurant. There is also a lounge on the ninth floor, the laboratory for preserving the books, and Special collection department (Duff 94). The HWLC is a combination of the traditional architectural form with modern functionality. However, if the library had to be built with the modern perspective in mind, the building would have looked similar to the Seattle

Central Library or the Picture Book Museum at Iwaki City. The HWLC library confirms to both design and functionality.

But design has a greater predominance with lots of ornamentation and stress on detailing works. However, modern library design would be more minimalistic in nature will less stress on ornamentation, and more space. The library space, as perceived by many, is believed to be a stuffy space.

Therefore, proper use of space, light, and air is important to remove the stuffy feeling. This element is found missing in the HWLC library, that has a more dominance traditional walled concept of the library. The reading room of HWLC is found to be large though walled from all sides, with light gray walls that make the rooms morose to some extent. However, a reading space with lots of light filtering though glassed walls would provide a great respite for readers, as they would be in constant connection with the external world and the stuffiness of the books all around can be removed. Therefore, the functions of the library should dictate what the look of the building should be rather than designing the looks and then fitting in the functions.

A modern building would use less of the classical material like marbles, red bricks, granite, etc. The library building in a modern sense would use materials like concrete, glass, and aluminum. However, a particular blend of modernity and traditional architectural form in the exteriors can become confusing. One simple usage of this blend can be in allowing the exterior of the building resemble a traditional classical architectural design, while the interior being designed to attain optimum functionality through modern minimalistic style.

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However, a mix of both in the exterior as well as in the exterior creates a confusion of designs. Works Cited
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