

lights and lantern rooflight are of significance to the form and ambience of the Domed Reading Room and should therefore ideally be reinstated. This is however, conditional on other roofing works still being investigated. Future planning also involves restoration of McCoy Hall to provide an additional beautiful reading room and creation of new and exciting exhibition spaces.

Frances Awcock, chief executive officer and state librarian,

says the redevelopment process has presented a unique challenge. Not only is a whole city block to be dedicated to library purposes, but the redeveloped buildings will provide exciting links between the past, the present and the future.

As well as celebrating our heritage through restoration of many of the nineteenth-century interiors and the great Domed Reading Room, we will also be creating facilities and services that are highly visible expressions of the 'new age'. ■

Youthful creations: designs for all ages

Ruth Cameron, manager community information and libraries, Brisbane City Council Library Service

What do the words 'library design' mean to a librarian? The challenges of combining form with function, users' needs with practical restraints, and workflow requirements with aesthetic considerations are formidable.

The design work of librarians generally includes such activities as working with the project's architects and library staff to detail the brief, negotiating with developers, planning the project and ensuring that the design is operationally sound. Depending on the scope and size of the project, the librarian might also be involved with furniture selection, light and safety fittings, or even colour co-ordination. Juggling these considerations is impossible without input from the final end-users of the service — tapping into the needs and wants of customers is vital.

The Brisbane City Council harnessed the creative talents of one of its most vital — and most demanding — customer groups when it invited the young people of Brisbane to become involved in planning a 'youthspace' at the Mount Ommaney Library.

The youthspace was designed to appeal to customers aged twelve to seventeen. Approximately sixty square metres in area, rectangular-shaped and defined by a curved feature wall, a large display wall, windows and shelving, the space is relaxed, colourful and very distinctive.

It features a 'comfy corner' with bean bags, lounge chairs and popular books, magazines and music. It also provides Internet access, networked CD-ROM and Databank facilities, a whiteboard, pigeonholes and a large display wall. Local young people have decorated the space with a retro-look table and artwork such as silk hangings, posters and small sculptures.



Leader of the Mount Ommaney Library youth group speaks at the opening of the library's youthspace

The youthspace functions as an informal study area and as a place where young people can select items for loan, read, meet friends, chat, play board-games and create artwork for the mini-gallery's display wall.

Young people are encouraged to use the whole library and, although the youthspace was designed to meet their needs and style, they do not have exclusive use of the area. The youthspace is not physically separate from the library, but is an incorporated part of the whole. This allows the youthspace and its facilities to be fully accessible during open hours while also providing an appropriate mix of visibility, privacy and independence for young people.

The key to its success is that it derived from a genuine expressed community youth need and developed through local youth participation and input facilitated by a special consultant.

The Mount Ommaney Library youthspace highlights a number of the most important design values and criteria to consider when designing public libraries.

These include:

- open communication with all stakeholders;
- a co-operative and flexible team;
- spacious, open-plan layout with spaces for community interaction;
- a mix of formal study areas with informal lounges and chatting space;
- wide spacing between rows to facilitate wheelchair and trolley access;
- low maximum shelf heights for better reach, visibility and ambience;
- quality materials, fittings and finishes to reduce maintenance and give confidence in service;
- ample plain-language signage; and
- congenial staff facilities for staff health, safety, security and morale.

Whatever the size or scope of a public library design project, its success can only be judged by its customers. The youthspace at Mount Ommaney has succeeded: it is in full use and the Brisbane City Council has funded two more youthspaces for 1998. ■