

POSITION, POSITION, POSITION: MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR LOCATION



There were two major challenges facing staff in renovating the main library located in Double Bay in 2011. The building, known as St Brigids, is heritage-listed which limits the architectural options available. They also faced the inherent challenges associated in introducing 21st century library facilities into a non-purpose built building as St Brigids was essentially a large family home built in 1871.

Our vision is for our library to be a place where customers are able to relax, enjoy their visit and make use of the enhanced technological facilities, including RFID self-check machines. The brief given to CK Design was to primarily take advantage of the natural beauty of the location for St Brigids, situated in Blackburn Gardens overlooking Sydney Harbour, and create a space that would become a community hub.

Previous renovations of St Brigids had resulted in the library interior being painted in heritage colours, with mushroom pink predominant. The entrance to the library was dominated by a large wooden staff desk and the wooden bookshelves had seemed to grow like Topsy over the years, with many of the shelves now blocking the view over the gardens and harbour. The result was an interior which projected a formal approach to client interaction.

The new renovations saw the end of the traditional staff desk. This was replaced instead with a small round table at which staff and customers both sit, heralding a new ethos of inclusiveness for customers. Innovations have included the removal of some walls, the conversion of a major beam holding up the veranda into a seat and areas previously dominated by wooden bookshelves transformed into a study zone with wireless access. The study zone overlooks the gardens and has proved a popular place for students.

The interior of the library is now painted cream, enhancing the feeling of spaciousness and the renovations also unexpectedly uncovered a frieze of what appears to be Greek gods cavorting, located just outside the entrance to the youth reading room. The library was closed for approximately six weeks while the renovations took place and the wait was worth it as the feedback from the community has been fabulous.

At the library reopening on 12 September, gone was the sombre, formal library interior. Instead customers were greeted with a design interior that had a real wow factor; being light and airy and reflecting the harbourside location.

Looking back, perhaps the main lesson was not to underestimate the time it takes for building renovations to be completed. The library opening occurred one week after schedule. Staff had to learn to operate within 'ordered disorder', with a maze of boxes of books awaiting re-shelving among desks and new workflows required to accommodate the renovations. Staff showed initiative in ensuring that the public inconvenience was minimised. These efforts did not go unnoticed, as one member of the public noted, "Well done to everyone who has worked so hard – now enjoy".

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A comfortable mix of heritage and modern design makes the most of the view



Renovations revealed a classic frieze which is now a feature

