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2018 AIA/ALA Library Building Awards Announced

By Christina Vercelletto on May 1, 2018 [Leave a Comment](#)

The [American Institute of Architects](#) (AIA) partners each year with the [American Library Association \(ALA\)/Library Leadership and Management Association](#) (LLAMA) to recognize the best in library architecture and design. The [2018 AIA/ALA Library Building Awards](#), announced on April 6, included public libraries from Cape Cod to California.

“World-class libraries can be of any size and design, but the element of transformation, where you leave the world behind and fully engage in learning, is still one of the most important outcomes of outstanding design,” said juror Lisa Lintner Valenzuela, library director, Johnson County Public Library in Franklin, IN.

This year’s winners all fill that bill. “When [the libraries] are approached and entered, patrons have a sense of awe wash over them,” said Lintner Valenzuela.

“The most successful designs include different kinds of spaces—areas for group collaboration, others for intensive individual work,” juror Sara A. Bushong, dean of University Libraries at Bowling Green State University, OH, told *Library Journal*. “In addition, users enjoy spaces that have natural light [and] overlook something interesting, whether an urban area, a lush landscape, or a body of water. All of the winners embrace these characteristics.”

Despite the variety in the winning libraries when it comes to architecture and geography, Bushong noted that “they all expressed a sincere desire to connect to their user bases.” Lintner Valenzuela agreed. “In each case, the user and the community [were] carefully studied, and the design of the exteriors and interiors reflect the community’s motivations for learning.”

Fit is also key for a 21st-century library, added juror Terri Luke, senior manager of library facilities for Wake County, NC. “How the architect and the library staff brought together the best physical layout and appointments to fit the community [the library] serves was the basis on which I judged the libraries,” said Luke. “All of the entries have at least one outstanding element and possibly more, but the stellar examples were those that integrated excellence in design with functionality for the library customer.”

Those six stellar examples are as follows:


[Austin Central Library, Austin, TX](#)
Lake|Flato Architects and Shepley Bulfinch


Situated in west downtown Austin, this \$120




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million library/community center features a bright, airy six-story atrium and a rooftop reading porch with views of Shoal Creek and Lady Bird Lake. A Maker space, cookbook-themed coffee shop, kitchen, and 350-seat special events center round out the offerings at “Austin’s Library of the Future,” as John Gillum, manager of the library’s facilities services department, calls it. Hiking and biking trails are adjacent to the library. The building, expected to soon be LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) Platinum certified, utilizes a 373,000 gallon cistern that funnels rainwater into the restroom and irrigation systems. This is an important consideration in frequently drought-stricken Austin.



Eastham Public Library, Eastham, MA

Oudens Ello Architecture

“I somehow knew the library would win this award,” said Eastham director Debra DeJonker-Berry. “I think because of the way it makes me feel every time I come to work, and the way it makes people feel when they are here. The natural light, beauty of the pond, sunsets, and the fresh Cape air continually coming in thanks to the new HVAC design.”



The original single room that was the entire Eastham Public Library when it opened in 1898 is on the National Register of Historic Places, so the design team had to get creative in keeping that piece intact while reimagining a library to meet the needs of a community that increases sixfold during the summer months. Most of the new structure was placed to the rear of the property, overlooking one of Cape Cod’s many glacial kettle ponds. From the road the library doesn’t look much larger, and still blends into the residential area. Weathered cedar shingles and bluestone flooring underscore the coastal location. That location brings special considerations, which were effectively addressed in the form of a stormwater retention system and vegetated bioswales (attractive landscaping fixtures) to manage storm surges.

“A major highway bifurcates the town, so it does not have a traditional downtown. For many, the new library now provides a town center,” said DeJonker-Berry.

Hastings Public Library, Hastings, NE

The Clark Enersen Partners

This major renovation turned a drab, worn Kennedy-administration era building into a modern educational hub that’s brought a buzz of energy to downtown Hastings. The design team had their work cut out for them, confronting safety and accessibility issues, including asbestos. Those were made no less challenging by the constraints of the location, which allowed virtually no room for expansion. The library was gutted and completely reimagined. “Clark Enersen took a very closed-off building and made it open and adaptable. This space is flexible, bright, inviting, and welcoming to all, exactly what a library should be now and always,” said library director Amy Hafer.



The new facade gives the library a fresh identity, and the improvements inside are just as impressive. These include an entire floor dedicated to young readers, outfitted with age-appropriate tech, and a formerly underused basement transformed into a Maker space and archives. “Our lower level is very special to us. Before it was just storage, and now it’s a place for the community to learn upcoming technology and create their own content,” Morgan Karel, public relations coordinator for Hastings, told *LJ*.

User Experience



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Laurel Branch Library, Largo, MD *Grimm + Parker Architects*

Replacing one of the most heavily-used libraries in Prince George's County, this building sits in a special location: directly adjacent to Emancipation Park, a historic site with deep roots in the African-American community of the area. The new, larger library had to expand into an acre of the park in order to have sufficient parking. In exchange, developers added enhancements to the rest of the park, such as interpretative signs and poles and an amphitheater used for Emancipation Day celebrations.



Inside are the works of local artists, plenty of new spaces for community meetings—and a dinosaur dig site for kids. Michael B. Gannon, chief operating officer for support services for Prince George's County Memorial Library System, thinks Discovery Island is the most unique aspect of the library. "It has a replica dinosaur skeleton under a glass floor, an 'erupting' volcano, color-changing dinosaur footprints in the floor, and a study area inside a Brontosaurus rib cage," he explained. "I love how the children interact with the features." The layout is intuitive, so patrons don't need to rely on signs. Sweeps of hardy native plants and oak trees add beauty to the library grounds. Flowering cherry trees recall Washington, DC, only 30 minutes to the west.

"The lobby, restrooms, meeting rooms, and computer lab can get power, heating, cooling, and Wi-Fi from a generator. This area can be opened to the community in the event of a major power outage or catastrophic weather event," added Gannon.

(For more coverage of Laurel Branch Library, see *Library Journal*, May 1, 2018, p. 26ff.)

Pico Branch Library, Santa Monica, CA *Koning Eizenberg Architecture, Inc.*

Designed in line with the community's expressed desire for a social gathering spot that maximized green space, this nearly 9,000 square foot

building is the first new library built in Santa Monica in 60 years. On Saturdays, its front door opens onto the local farmers market, a fact that has inspired multiple library programs on nutrition.

A new community room and amphitheater host programs for seniors, teens, and job seekers. An automatic book sorter has allowed staff more time to directly assist patrons. Best of all, families who previously hadn't used the library have started showing up. In the first six months after opening its doors, the library added 1,200 new members.



Tulsa City-County Central Library, Tulsa, OK
MSR Design

This library stands ready to help revitalize the urban core of Oklahoma. The entrance was made easier to access, and an 88,000 square foot parking garage with an inside link to the library was built. The exterior was set with new cast-stone panels, public art surrounding the building was refurbished, and the entire circa-1965 building was thoroughly cleaned. The civic plaza surrounding the library, previously harsh and uninviting, has been repaved, landscaped, and equipped with seating for hundreds of people near a new outdoor garden. Perhaps the most eye-catching piece of Central, this area serves as a meeting space when the library is closed. "Here, customers can enjoy outdoor story times, movie nights on the jumbo screen, and numerous programs that offer the beauty of nature in an urban setting," Central Library CEO Kimberly Johnson told *Library Journal*.



Glass study cubes entice passersby with a peek inside. The Maker space has a recording studio and labs outfitted with laser engravers, flight simulators, and 3-D printers. "Customer- focused models and engaging staff provide connection and relationship, while self-directed service technology provides customer convenience parallel with modern day experiences," said Johnson. "Central Library and the entire Tulsa City-County Library system is dedicated to growing with our communities, adapting to their needs and meeting them where they are...in the 21st century."

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