Winter 2016

UNION STUDIO news

Back to the Future...

The Tiverton Public Library brings tradition and 21st century design together.

Back to the Future

Six years in the making, Tiverton's new public library opened its doors to a welcoming crowd in late June 2015. Testament to the anticipation that preceded the ribbon cutting, within 15 days of opening the library issued more library cards than they had in the past year and a half combined. At the ribbon cutting, the Chief of Library Services at Rhode Island's Office of Library and Information Services lauded the library as the

"crown jewel in the network of libraries across the state of Rhode Island." As the newest and most sophisticated public library in the state, the Tiverton Library demonstrates what can be accomplished when state authorities and local communities work together with a committed design team toward a common goal.

"The staff and I are thrilled to see the community using the spaces as we envisioned," notes Ann Grealish-Rust, Director of Tiverton Library Services.

Despite a spectacular outcome, however, the Tiverton Library did not happen without a significant commitment. This building resulted from decades of local advocacy, a well-timed federal grant, a successful local capital campaign, and a tense and narrowly won bond referendum. Through it all, a core group of committed local advocates worked tirelessly in support of this community vision for a new gathering place. This is a civic building in the greatest sense of the word, and we are honored to have been part of it.

The Chief of Library Services at Rhode Island's Office of Library and Information Services lauded the library as the "crown jewel in the network of libraries across the state of Rhode Island."

The Historic Essex Library

"Located in a lovely setting, designed in perfect proportion for its function, this little temple of learning symbolizes the aspirations of its donor - Lydia Essex.

Tiverton may well be proud and happy over its contribution to learning. It sets an example of what people can accomplish working together for a noble purpose. At a time of frustration and destruction for the library world, it stands as a beacon of hope. May its rays reach far and wide to cheer, to encourage and inspire emulation."

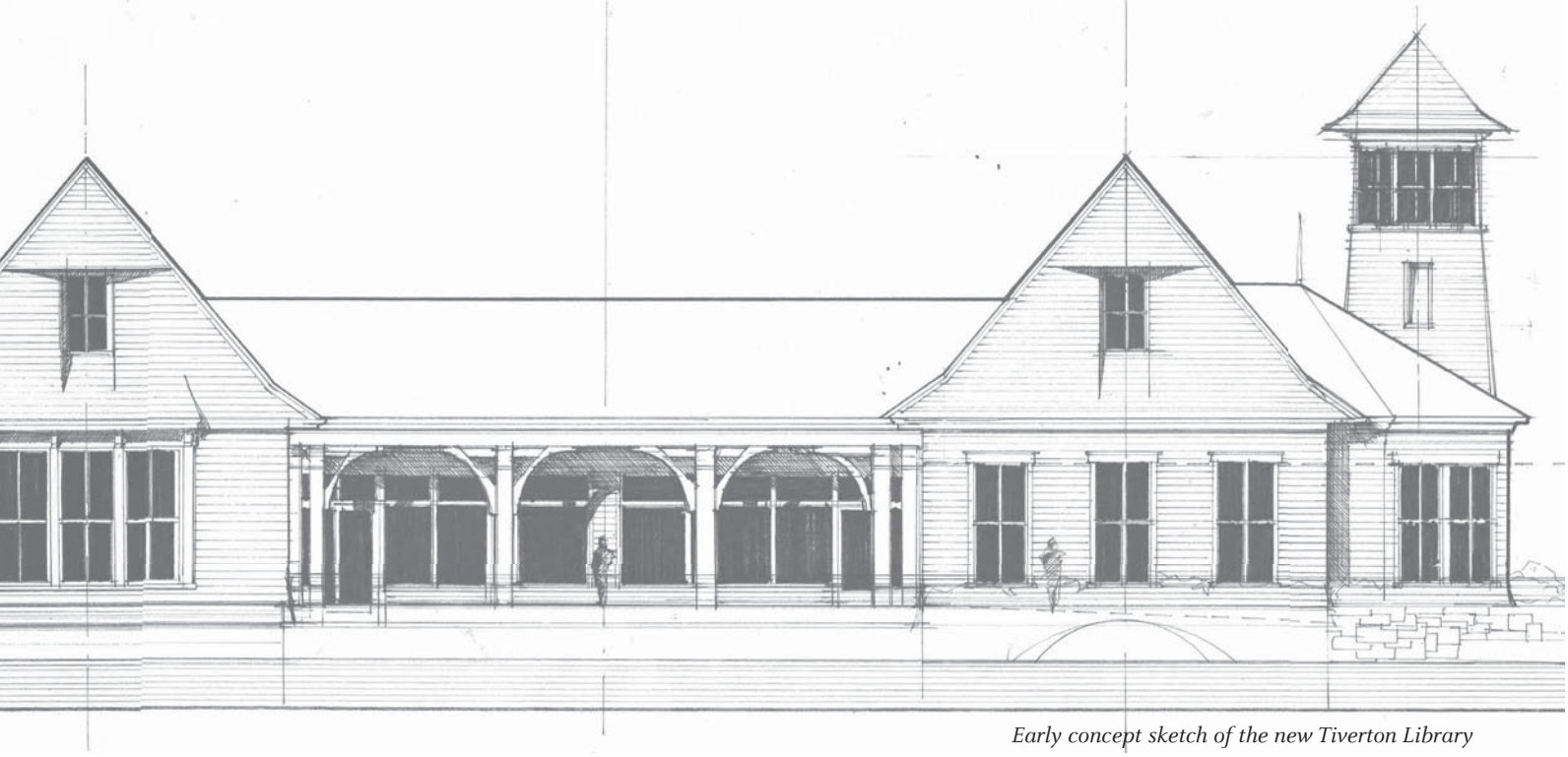
"The Library Journal" Dec. 15, 1940

HISTORY

The story of the Tiverton Library began nearly 75 years ago in the wake of the 1938 hurricane. Local resident Lydia Essex made an exceptionally generous donation to the Town of Tiverton expressly for the purpose of building a free community library. The result was a simple and elegant stone building perched at the top of Middle Street with what, at the time, would have been a commanding view over the town below and out to the shores of the Sakonnet River. This library served the communities of Little Compton, Dartmouth, and Tiverton for over 70 years and, to its credit, was largely able to adapt to the shifting needs of libraries and patrons through the years.

As early as 1980, however, it was clear to the patrons and to many on the library board that the Essex Library could no longer serve the community as well as it once had. Starting nearly 30 years ago, a committed group of local citizens began the bittersweet effort to replace this historic gem.

After many years of gathering support in the community and pulling together funds to begin the design effort, the board of trustees began their search for a design firm to assist them in realizing their vision for a new 21st century library for Tiverton. In 2009, Union Studio was selected from a competitive field of architects to lead the design and community visioning process.



Early concept sketch of the new Tiverton Library

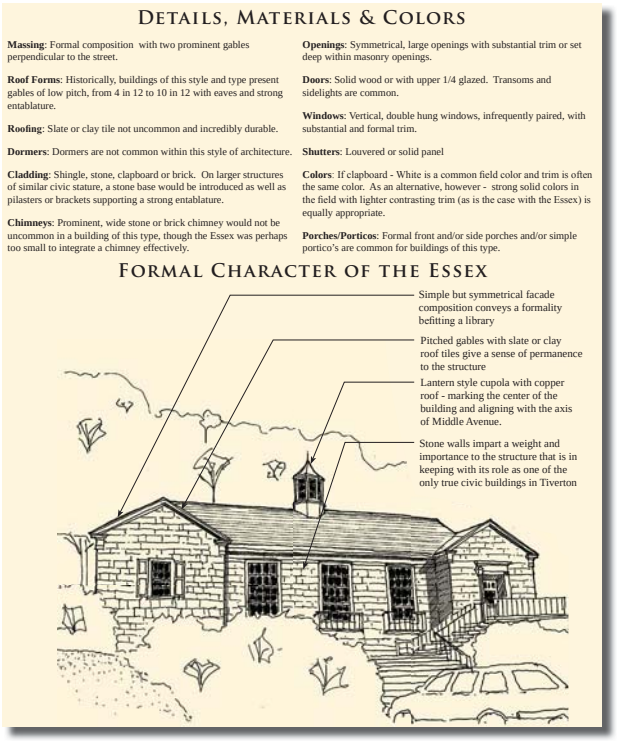
DESIGN FOCUS

Exterior

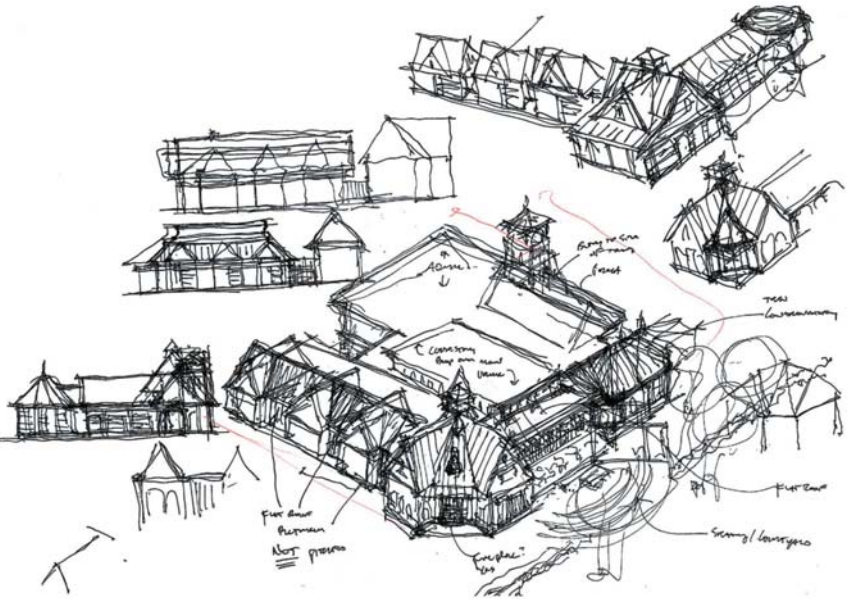
For Union Studio, the Tiverton Library offered an opportunity to design a place that would be both strongly contextual and historically connected while providing the flexibility and amenity of a 21st century library. From the outset, the building committee insisted that they wanted a library whose image would be harmonious with the community and would recall the classic simplicity of the original Essex Library. Our approach to materials and building massing in the initial elevation sketches was largely based on a thorough look at the vernacular of Tiverton and a review of rural civic buildings in New England. These initial design studies strongly referenced the historic Essex Library while incorporating materials and forms of local agricultural and maritime precedent.

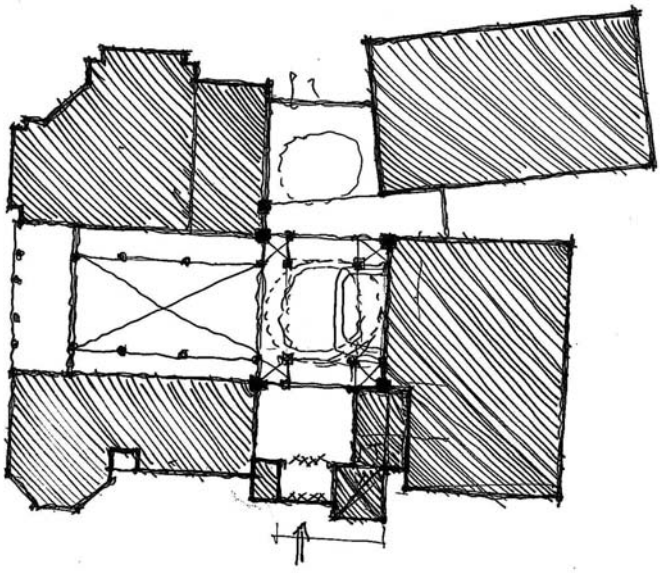
Interior

While much emphasis was placed on a reserved and contextual exterior, when it came to discussing how this library would need to serve the community, it was clear that the desire was for a flexible, modern, and data-rich 21st century community gathering place. Gone were the notions of the library as a pensive, reserved, and inwardly focused repository for knowledge. Union Studio, along with the building committee and the library director, shared a strong vision for a flexible, energy efficient, technology-rich library that would reach out to the broader community and actively engage everyone from children to teens to small business owners and the elderly. For Union Studio, the opportunity to re-think the public library as a truly civic community meeting space was a wonderful



A formal analysis of the design of the Essex Library was discussed during public meetings and as part of Union Studio's schematic design proposal. Understanding the elements that contributed to the character of the Essex was a critical foundation for the design team. What limited resources were available in 1939 were spent on solid, durable materials, competent craftsmanship and time honored detail. In short, the Essex Library is undoubtedly "of" Tiverton and carries itself both with an ease and a formality that is fitting for a library. There is no doubt that this simple building "inspired emulation".





Top left: The completed west elevation showing covered terrace
Bottom left: Early sketches of the building's floor plan and proposed massing

Right: The outcome of community input - a covered terrace provides space for events, programs and seating for visitors to enjoy temperate days.

way to apply our passion for community and neighborhood placemaking to an important civic landmark for the town of Tiverton.

COMMUNITY INPUT

The design and visioning process began with a series of community meetings and charrettes to gather input from community groups, library staff, town officials, students, families, and local businesses. The purpose was two-fold: first, to encourage people to think about libraries in a whole new way, and then to ask them to imagine what a community centered library would "look like" to them. What kinds of things would it have or be able to provide? "From Union Studio's point of view, the way we could be most helpful to our clients during this process was to make sure that everyone had an opportunity to voice their opinion -- specifically their hopes -- for what they wanted this building to be" notes Union Studio Principal, Douglas Kallfelz. "This meant engaging the community frequently and in a variety of formats, providing as many people as possible the opportunity to contribute to the vision." The design team needed to be flexible, meeting groups on their terms if necessary. "Being available and open to meeting with user groups regularly was certainly a challenge, but when people finally saw the

TIME
POPULAR SCIENCE
BOATING
Yachting
YOGA
FOOD

MAIN CIRCULATION SPACE / READING ROOM

The library also needed to operate in ways that traditional libraries often cannot. The staff, building committee and users alike recognized that libraries need to provide means for engaging with one another and with the myriad of information outlets that stretch beyond the walls of the institution.

design and realized they had been heard, the effort was well worth it."

One simple example was the desire for an outdoor reading area. Several groups mentioned having an outdoor "room" for book clubs, reading or events. Never mind that this ran counter to traditional security concerns for a public library. Notes Kallfelz, "after teasing out the practicalities of an outdoor reading area with the staff and the library director, the possibility not only became real, but the staff began to actually get excited about how this could open up opportunities for them and their library programs."

The results of the many workshops along with countless interviews with the staff and director laid the groundwork for an early design process that uncovered and balanced the aspirations of the community and the needs of the library.

21st CENTURY DESIGN

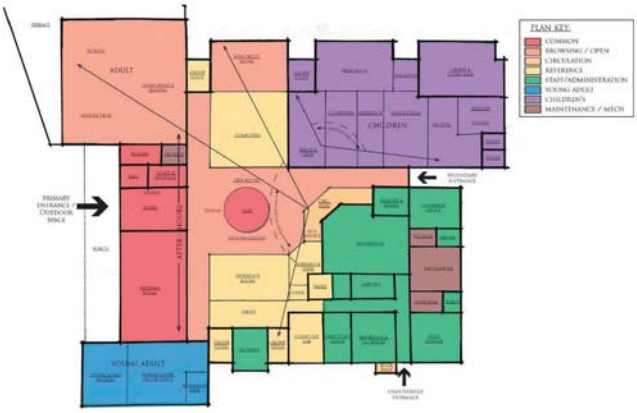
The library also needed to operate in ways that traditional libraries often cannot. While libraries need and will likely continue to house actual books for the foreseeable future, the staff, building committee and users alike recognized that libraries need to provide means for engaging with one another and with the myriad of information outlets that stretch beyond the walls of the institution. Understanding how quickly user needs and technology change, the library needed to be exceptionally flexible – a design imperative that Union Studio embraced.

Visibility

A primary concern for the staff was visibility. For safety and supervision purposes, it was critical that the library staff be able to have eyes on every part of the building. We organized the space so that the circulation desk, secondary staff desks and offices would have good sight lines to all areas of the library. In the programming meetings, we discussed the fact that the children's area would essentially function as a "library within a library." This space would be constantly monitored by a children's librarian who remained there throughout the day because visibility from the children's reference desk to all areas of the children's section would be necessary.

Access After Hours

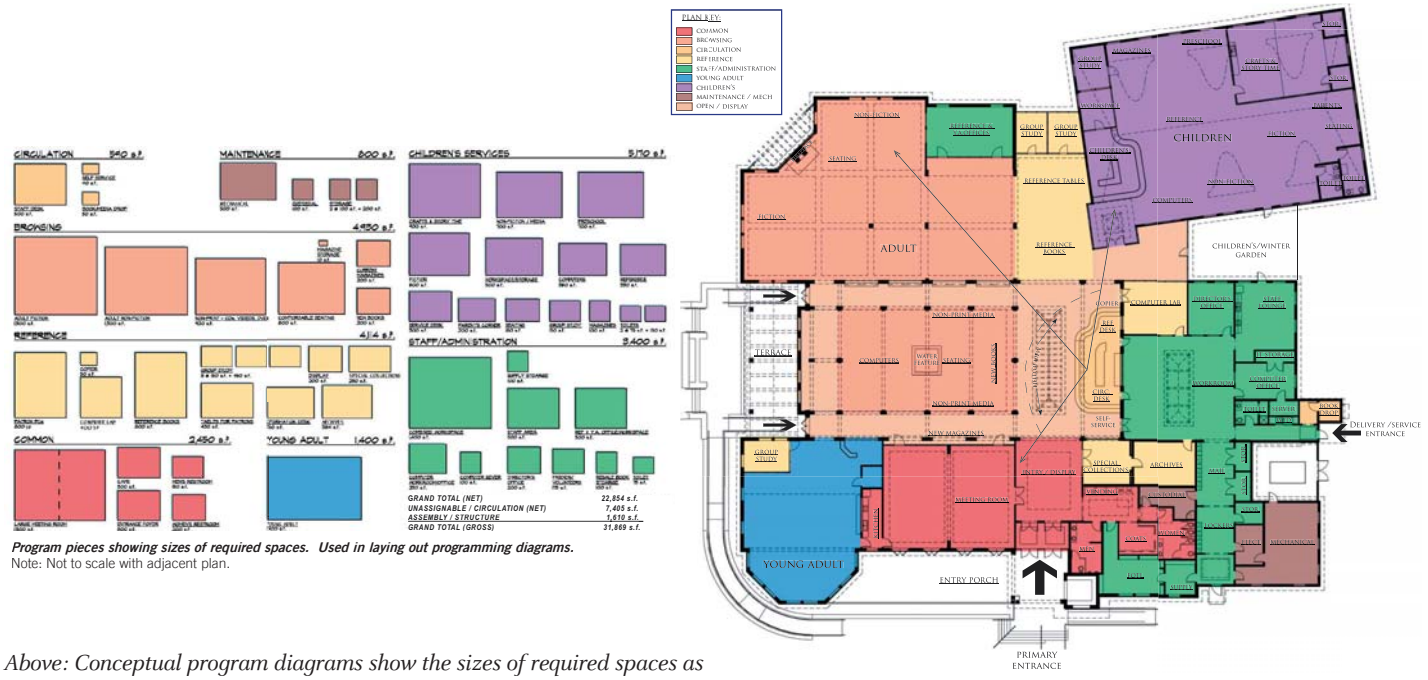
The Tiverton Library was expressly designed to allow an entire section of the library to operate independently during the evening. Two meeting rooms, a catering kitchen, coat room, and bathrooms are available for use



Programming Diagram - Option A. Presented to Library Staff 10/30/09.

Programming Diagram - Option B. Presented to Library Staff 10/30/09.

Above: A series of programming studies shows various alternatives for organizing space, reflecting the stakeholders' and library staff's priorities for adjacencies and relative relationships.

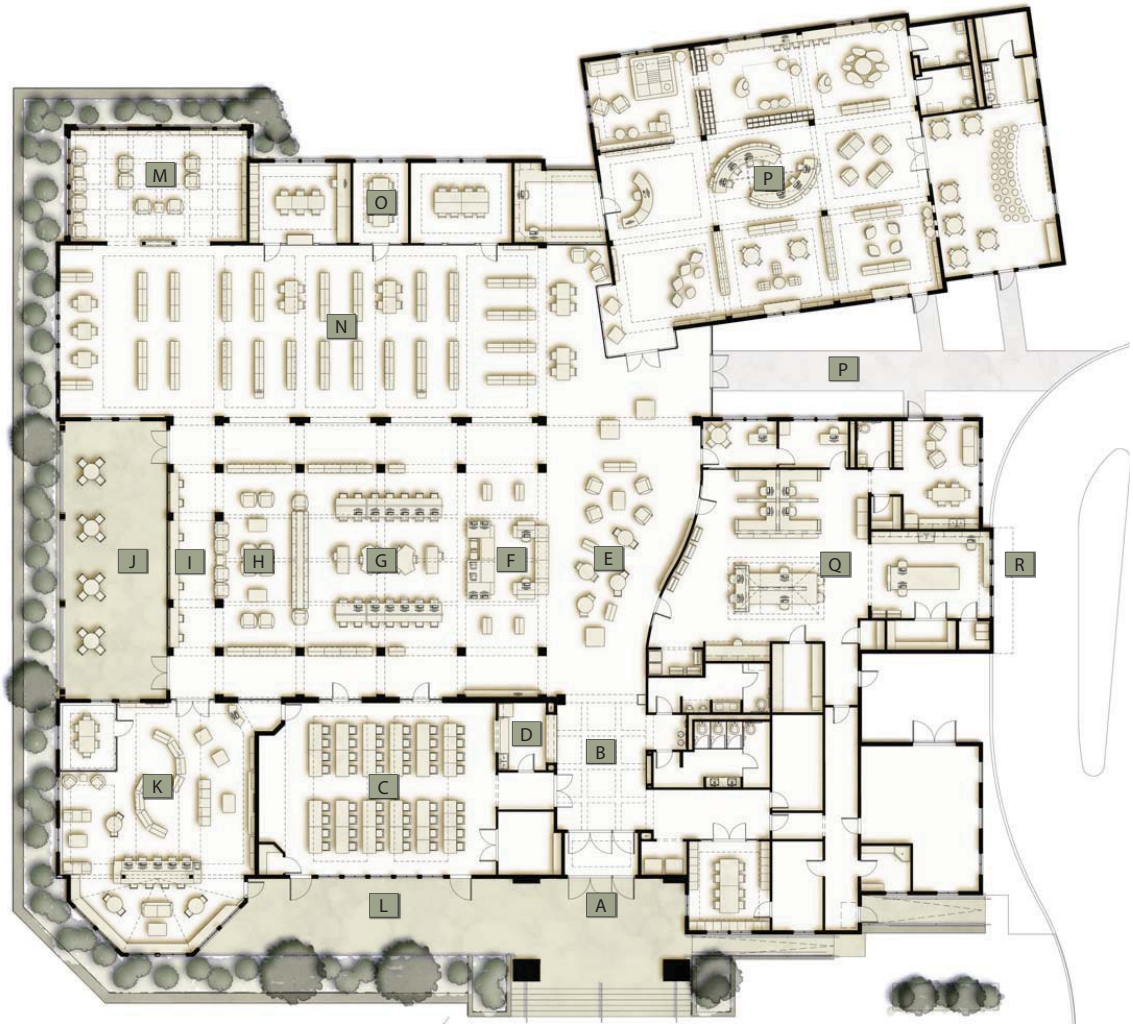


Program pieces showing sizes of required spaces. Used in laying out programming diagrams.
Note: Not to scale with adjacent plan.

Above: Conceptual program diagrams show the sizes of required spaces as expressed by the staff and the community.

Above Right: Sight lines to all areas of the library from the main circulation desk. Clear sight lines were a mandate from the library staff.

Below: Final Floor Plan



- A Main Library Entrance
- B Vestibule
- C Community Room
- D Kitchenette / Cafe
- E Popular Library / "Bookstore"
- F Service Point
- G Business Center / Technology Ctr
- H Living Room
- I Laptop Bar / Seating
- J Literary Terrace
- K Young Adult / Teen Library
- L Community Room Terrace
- M Adult Reading Room / Fireplace
- N General Stacks
- O Meeting Rooms / Local History
- P Children's Library and Garden
- Q Staff Workroom, Lounge and Offices
- R Drive-Up Service Window

after hours by local residents, businesses, and the town and can be scheduled with the library staff.

Modular Furniture And Flexible Space

In development of the library's $890,000 Furniture, Fixture and Equipment package, the Union Studio worked with consultant Kimberly Bolan to best understand current trends in library usage. The team prioritized "modularity" and "mobility" when selecting the furniture. The

Below (Top): The Children's Library welcomes young visitors with a separate entrance screened with phrases from various children's books (see inset). Graphics by Malcolm Grear Designers.

Below (Bottom): The Children's Library was designed to be a bright and engaging experience. A separate activity room located behind the Children's Library provides space for arts and crafts programs and other group activities.

CHILDREN'S LIBRARY

A children's library provides services, amenities and interactive stations for children and families. A dedicated activity space is included for stories, crafts, movies and active play. Computer stations provide dedicated access for children's reference and games.

This page: View through the 'Living Room' and Periodicals section towards the Adult Reading Room with Covered Porch to the West.

Below right: Union Studio worked with local furniture manufacturers to design custom modular pieces.

pieces were designed to be easily moved and re-arranged in a variety of different ways for future use. Union Studio worked with furniture manufacturers on the custom design of select pieces, such as computer stations, service points, and new book displays. The circulation desk is made of components that can be added or removed.

Roaming Staff And Customer Self Service

The library is carefully designed to encourage staff to be "on the floor," not sequestered behind a desk. The main service point is centrally located and open on all sides to engage users more actively. At the same time, users are encouraged to have a more casual and intimate connection with the library, as if they were browsing the bookshelves in their own home. Books requested are no longer held behind the desk, but out on a self service shelf that is integrated into the architecture of the main entrance. Self service stations are placed throughout the library to encourage self check-out.

Variety of spaces

A dedicated adult reading room with a fireplace provides a quiet reading space on the northwest corner of the building. Also along the north side of the building is a local history room and separate meeting rooms that can be reserved for group or individual use.

formation
Information

BOOK STORE CAFÉ

Several casual seating and gathering areas are provided throughout the library. At the main service point, a "book store café" space with high top tables and soft seating features new acquisitions and periodicals. Visitors are invited to simply browse the collection, wait for a friend and/or enjoy a cup of coffee.

YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY

A Young Adult library provides a gaming station, a dedicated study room with white board and projector, and a variety of gathering spaces for both small and large groups.

ADULT READING ROOM

A dedicated reading room with a fireplace provides a quiet reading space on the northwest corner of the building.

CONCLUSION

In designing the Tiverton Library, striking the right balance between a timeless and contextual building and the need for a flexible and modern program was perhaps the most difficult and rewarding challenge. The effort and research spent establishing the precedent for the building's exterior allowed the building to find a true home in the hearts of the Tiverton Community. The success of the interior approach is best articulated by the library director, Ann Grealish-Rust, "Not only is the library building beautiful and very functional, it has far exceeded our expectations as evidenced by the number of users that have rediscovered what a community library can be."

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR TEAM

Client:

Tiverton Library Services

Team Members:

Union Studio Architecture & Community Design - Architecture & Interiors
- Douglas Kallfelz - Principal in Charge
- Stephanie Zurek - Project Architect
- Kara Babcock - Project Designer

Behan Brothers, Inc. - Builder
Civil Engineering Concepts - Civil Engineer
Odeh Engineers - Structural Engineer
Wilkinson Associates - Mechanical, Plumbing & Fire Protection Engineer
Building Engineering Resources - Electrical Engineer
The Hickory Consortium - Sustainability Consultant
Jay Lucker - Library Consultant
Kimberly Bolan - Library Consultant
Birchwood Design Group - Landscape Architects
Nat Rea - Photography

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