



You don't need a new building or a major remodel to reinvent your library spaces. Learn how some key alterations to *existing* library space can refresh public perceptions and community engagement



First impressions, color, lighting, warmth, inviting, brighten, lighten

First impressions



Corrales Public Library,
Albuquerque NM

Corrales library: this is a library that was literally built by the community; volunteers from the community built the adobe construction, and then added all the interior décor in southwest motifs. The entry way is full of light, with a gurgling fountain and lush plants. The whole library has the look and feel of a home ---warm, welcoming, full of color and life.

Photo by B Gutsche

First impressions



Acocks
Green
Library,
Birmingham
UK

By contrast, this library entrance looks cluttered and messy. The handsome woodwork is diminished by all the brochures, pamphlets and boxes on the floor. What would you do to make this a more welcoming and inviting entrance for visitors?

Acocks Green Library entrance (clutter) by DynaMickinAcocksGreen:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dynamickinacocksgreen/3717023059>

Bold Color



So many libraries are colorless ---gray carpets, beige walls, gray metal shelving. A little bold color goes a long way. Even one wall painted in an accent color can liven up the whole space.

Hoover Public Library by ESwift: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eswift/2021937085>

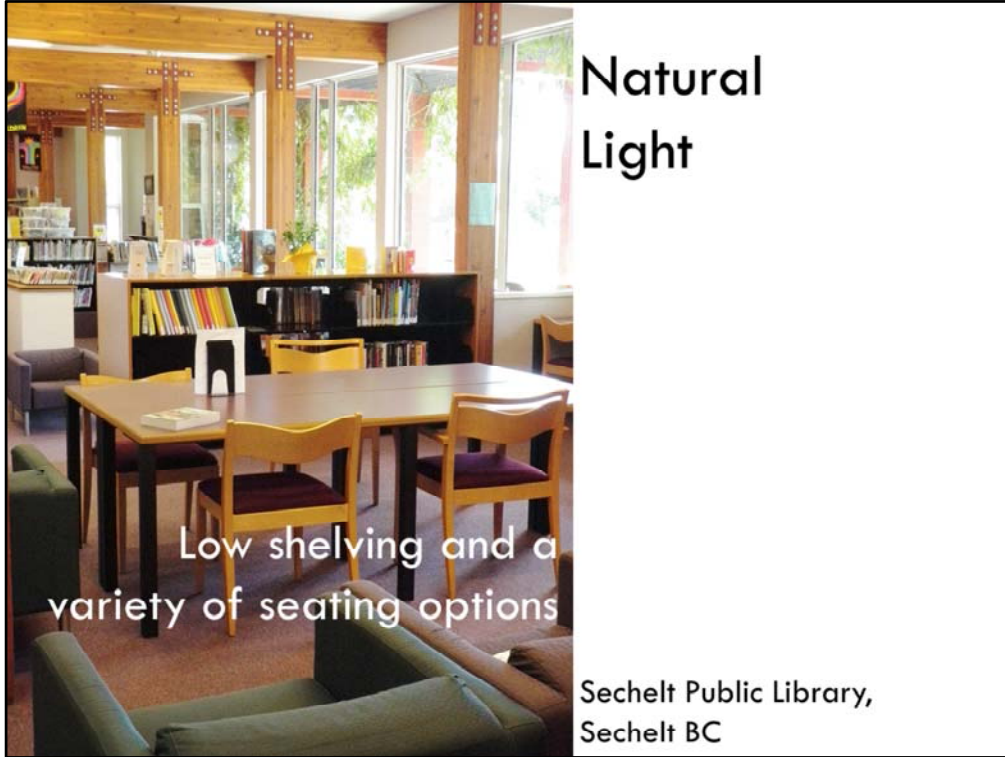


Bold Color

Newcastle branch of KCLS (WA)

Even if you can't afford a new carpet, can you find some colorful used furniture, or some area rugs?

Newcastle branch of KCLS by B Gutsche



Natural Light

Low shelving and a variety of seating options

Sechelt Public Library,
Sechelt BC

The low shelving lets natural light penetrate deeper into the building. Comfortable reading chairs and work tables are placed near the windows to take advantage of the light.

Sechelt Public Library (BC) by B Gutsche

Natural Light, but...



There is lots of natural light in this library but the arrangement of the chairs and shelving could be better. How would you rearrange the furniture to create more cozy reading nooks and separated spaces?

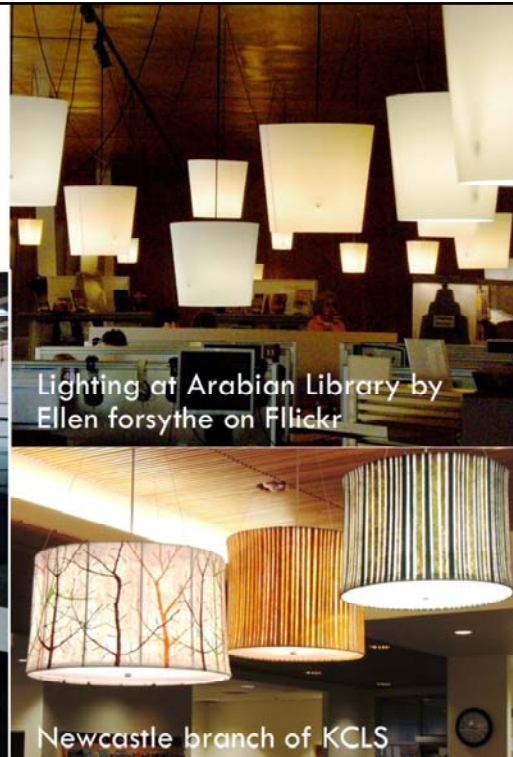
Before-Video and E Collection by Monterey PL:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/montereypubliclibrary/4924426030/>

Artificial Light



Lighting at Phoenix PL by Ellen forsythe on Flickr



Lighting at Arabian Library by Ellen forsythe on Flickr

Newcastle branch of KCLS

Industrial ceiling lighting may be necessary to illuminate all parts of the library building but that doesn't mean you can't add more appealing and intimate lighting. Lighting can define a space and invite people to sit and read or study.

Lighting at Phoenix PL by Ellen forsythe:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/elf/5872210609>

Arabian Library by Ellen forsythe:

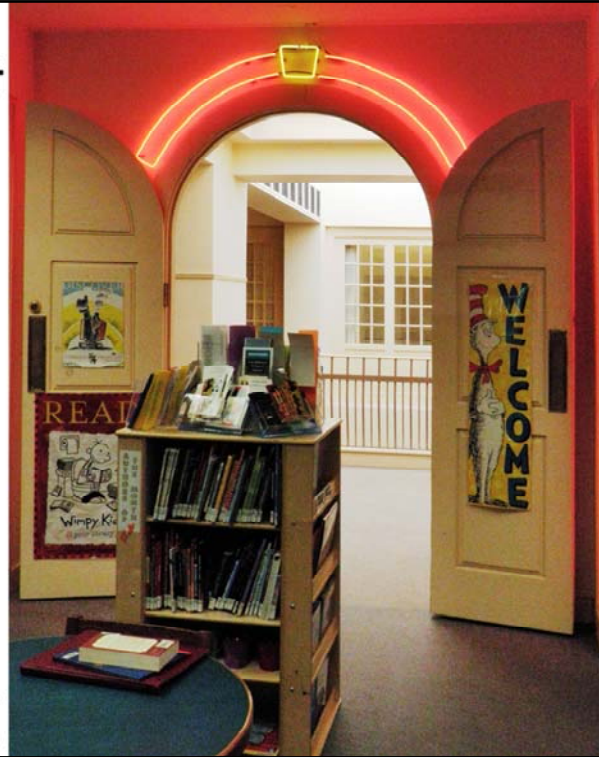
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/elf/5856004203/in/set-72157627094794958>

(Scottsdale PL AZ)

Light and Lighting album by Ellen forsythe:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/elf/sets/72157627094794958>

Artificial Light



Santa Fe Public Library,
Santa Fe NM

Using light for color and atmosphere: this neon emphasizes the architecture, adds color and creates a playful atmosphere suitable for the children's section of the library.

Photo by B. Gutsche



There are many examples of colorful and *fun* signage to guide people to the children's and teens areas of the library. However, when it comes to the adult sections, signs are often too small and too ordinary to attract attention, which is the main function of a sign.

Children's at Minneapolis PL by Schu:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/litandmore/3671366663>

teen entry by anneheathen:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/annethelibrarian/2968634278> (Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library)

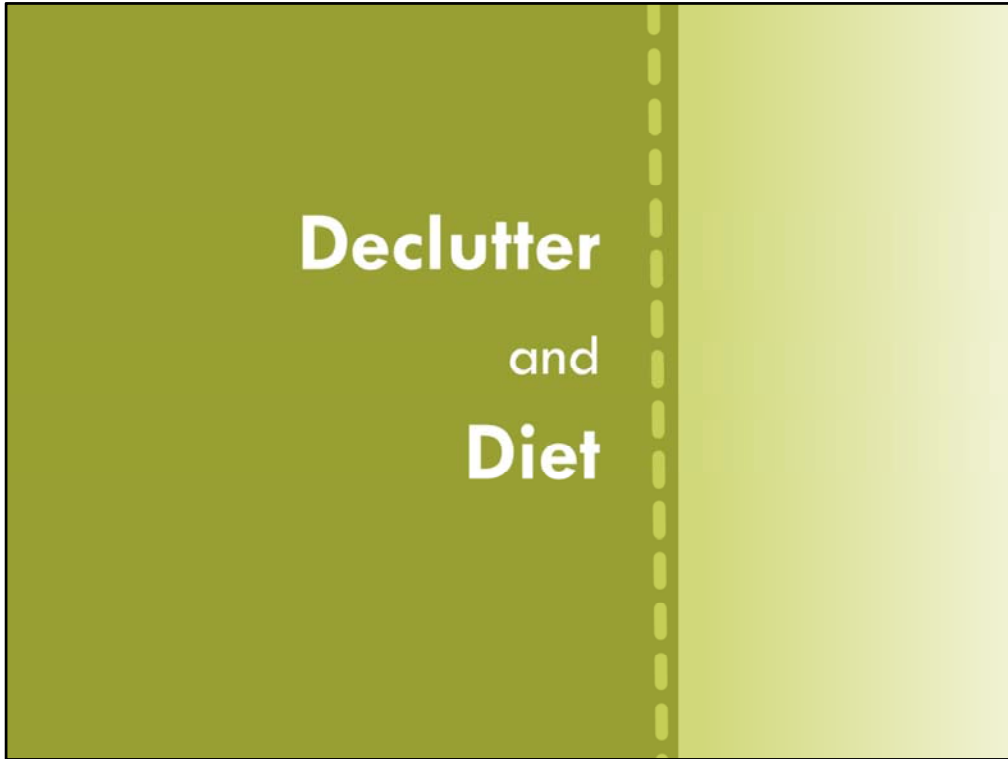


The Delft Public Library offers a great model of bold and attention-grabbing signage in the adult areas of the library.

“spanning” means “tension” in Dutch --- suspense novels here?

Un-library like signage by The Shifted Librarian:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/shifted/2341587187> Delft Public Library
(Netherlands)



declutter, weed (outdated CDs/other), choice overload



KCLS was inspired by The Choice Overload Problem. The paradox of choice.

https://www.ted.com/talks/sheena_iyengar_choosing_what_to_choose

- Too many choices can be overwhelming
- Avg American makes 70 choices per day
- the more choices offered, more likely to defer or not choose, to make poorer choices for themselves
- less is more! = improvement of the choosing experience
- graduated increase in complexity of information = “condition for complexity”; ex: KCLS eShelf displays

Photo: too many choices by Elvis Kennedy:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/elviskennedy/4556605516>

Too many choices?



The library equivalent of choice overload

KCLS made this change; used active off-site storage and digital options to reduce the number of items on the shelves.

Rethinking Shelf Space report:

<https://www.kcls.org/about/board/2011/04262011/AttachmentF.pdf>

Untitled by Eric Konon: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ekonon/8586796285/>

5

**items per
square foot**

This is the King County Library System rule for the collections in all their branches!

Weeding; Cut the amount of choices; existing items showcased and displayed with related resources

put things at eye-level, by the patron path, rather than by front door. 5 items per sf is much better than 10/sf.

--showcase a full range of physical items and digital content, bringing a broader range of popular and new items to community libraries

(4 sf/capita is for building)

Before ...



The area to the right of the white post contains mostly CDs and old VHS tapes. When the staff at Everson Branch of the Whatcom County Public Library (WA) checked their circulation statistics, they realized how little these items were being checked out. They chose to re-envision the use of this space.

Everson Library, Photo by Kevin J. Dingle

and after transformation



The area became the Nooksack Valley Heritage Center, where both digital and analog resources highlight Everson's rich history of which the residents are so proud. Prior to the remodel, visitors darted in, grabbed a CD, checked out and left. Now, they sit, explore and share in that same floor space.

Focus on what is *gained* in community engagement rather than what is lost in numbers of the collection items.

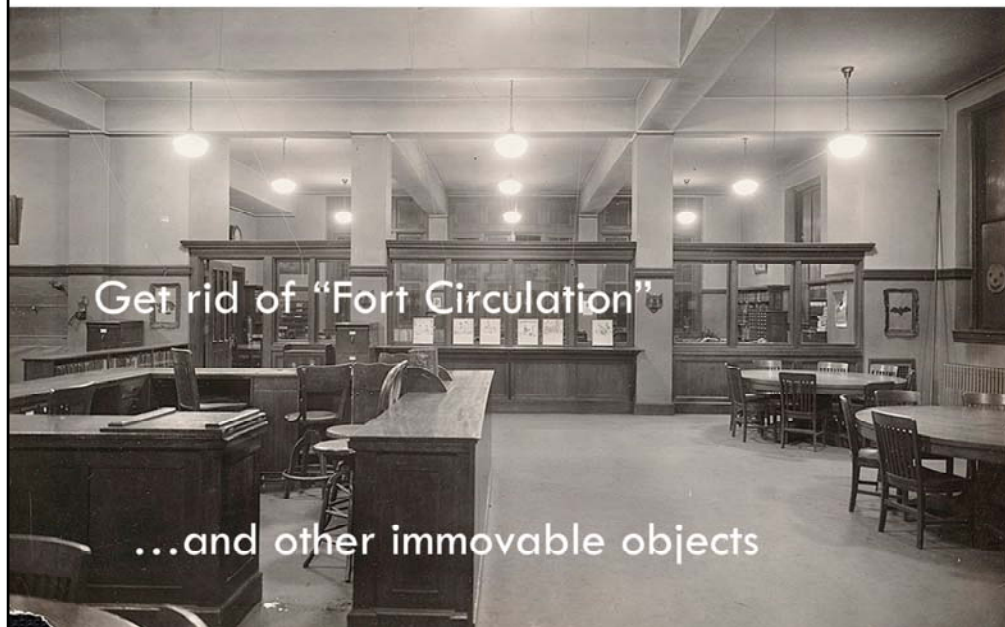
"Our remaining materials are more attractively displayed and easier to browse. Undoubtedly the shelves have heaved a collective sigh of relief after being liberated from too much weight." –Eileen Shaw

Photo by Eileen Shaw



**Flexible
Use**

Flexibility: removing barriers



Many libraries have large built-in furnishing, like the old circulation desk. From the patrons' point of view, these structures may feel imposing, intimidating, and create a barrier to getting into the rest of the library. If you have a "circulation fortress" in your library, is it possible to remove it? If you can, you'll free up a lot of space where you can imagine many more community-engaging possibilities.

Circulation desk by Boston PL:

https://www.flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library/5243505279

Flexibility: multi-use space



At the Covington Branch of KCLS, everything is on wheels ---the chairs, the tables, and even the shelves. With this rolling flexibility, the furniture can be rearranged for smaller reading and study areas or opened up to become a 400-seat meeting room for the community.

Covington library example of 400-seat meeting room

Webinar: Flexible Space, Flexible Futures:

<http://webjunction.org/events/webjunction/flexible-spaces-flexible-futures.html>



Rolling book shelves make this children's area even more colorful, playful and flexible.

Children's bookshelves on wheels by The Shifted Librarian; Delft Public Library (Netherlands): <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shifted/2342418466/in/set-72157604142377648>

Flexibility: makerwagon



If you think you don't have enough room to start a Makerspace, take some inspiration from this Makerwagon. This is maximum portability and flexibility.

Makerwagon by TeachThought.com on Flickr

Flexibility: oh the noise and chaos



Some may fear the noise and disruption that come with activities in the library open spaces.

When the Bellingham Public Library (WA) didn't have any closed meeting rooms available for its annual Holiday Tech Fair, they decided to hold it right in the middle of the library. Not only did they have record attendance, not one single patron complained about the noise.

Photo by Beth Farley

Technology is all about power

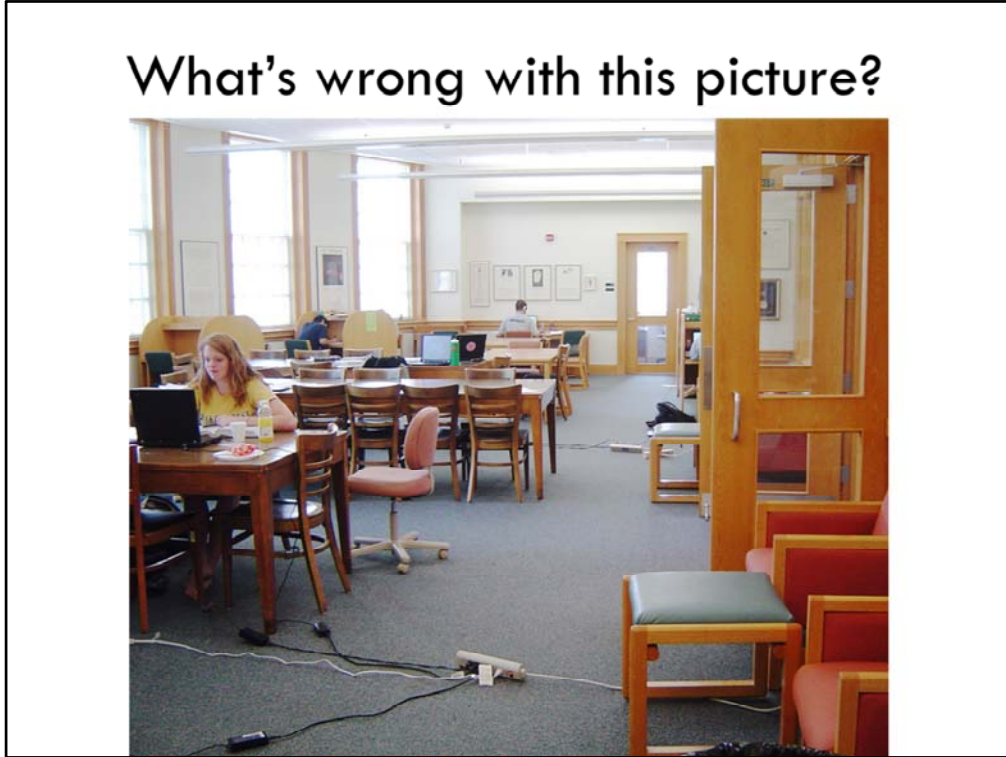
Data and electrical connections everywhere



With technology so integrated into library services, plentiful and convenient data and electrical connections are essential. In the remodel of the Renton Public Library, the bridge-like cement foundation made it impossible to run wiring in the floor, so the inventive architects ran it in the ceiling and found various artful ways to drop connections down to where people needed them.

Renton Public Library (WA) design concept from KCLS

What's wrong with this picture?



We've all seen something like this tangle of cords and power strips in a room with too few outlets.

Library before/after set from Z Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest Univ by vanherdehaag: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vanherdehaage/sets/72157604939581955>

Better?



The same room with a friendlier configuration of furnishings and no cords. Although it involves some investment, running wiring under the floor allows numerous low-profile outlets to be embedded in the flooring or carpet at the points where they are needed. One outlet per seat is *not* too many.

Library before/after set from Z Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest Univ by vanherdehaag: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vanherdehaage/sets/72157604939581955>

But I don't have the skills...



Your community is your resource

If you think you don't have the skills to design or build your library space vision, look to your community members. They may have the resources you need if you just ask. Getting them to contribute to solutions gets them invested and engaged in the library in an ongoing way.

At the Everson Branch of WCLS, just taking the action to clear out the floor space created anticipation and invited community involvement. People stopped to ask what was going on, and then volunteered to contribute to the effort.

Community volunteer group at Everson Library (WA) by Eileen Shaw

But I don't have the money...



\$400
media
lab

Feeling like you don't have the money to do anything is a significant barrier. It may be very real. Just take a moment to consider this story about a very small library in rural Delaware and how their wish for a teen media lab came true:

Upon reading about a flashy \$10K digital media lab at another library, Youth Services Librarian Tameca Beckett's first thought was "oh wow, *that's* not going to happen here." Then she took some reflection time, slowed down her thinking, took the problem apart piece-by-piece, and started to find a direction forward. She identified some key components to start with and purchased \$400 worth of basic hardware and software tools. With the impression this starter lab made on her patrons and community stakeholders, she and her director found a community agent to fund a more complete digital media lab. "It went from this big huge scary thing that could never happen, to look at these young people right now using the digital media lab."

Tameca Beckett, Youth Services Librarian, Laurel Public Library (DE)

---webinar Rural Library as Incubator:

http://webjunction.org/events/webjunction/Future_is_Now.html

What do you need to let go of?

- “Fort Circulation” is necessary
- Activity and noise will disturb our patrons
- Projects get too messy and dirty
- Community events should be separate from the main library space
- The collection shall not be diminished
- No room to do anything new
- No money for innovation

Concept of “letting go”

What do you need to let go of?