

Europe's new libraries

Striking downtown structures



↑ The new public library in Birmingham, flanked by the Repertory Theatre (left) and Baskerville House (right).

What role are new library buildings playing in urban development in Europe? The public library in Birmingham designed by Mecanoo and the Mediathèque in Saint-Denis-la-Plaine designed by Antonini + Darmon Architectes show some interesting approaches.

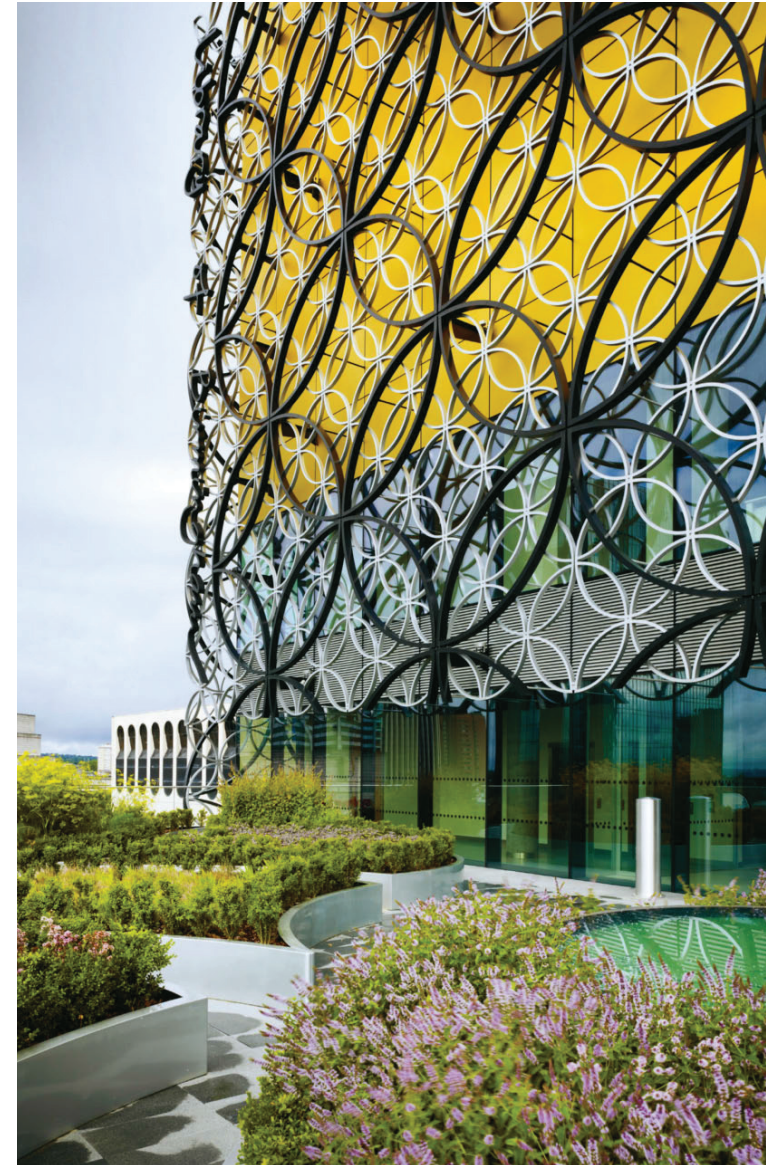
As recently as ten years ago, Birmingham was a city characterized by decades of decline and structural change. However, anyone visiting this major city today will get a different, positive impression. Birmingham has set itself the ambitious goal of realigning its economic foundations and becoming one of the most livable cities in the world by 2031. Connected to this are several new construction projects – particularly in the city center. These include the new public library which aims to become the city's social and cultural hub.

Transparent ringed facade

With the striking complex, the Delft-based architecture firm Mecanoo has not just simply created a new library. The new structure at Centenary Square closes a gap in the ur-

Library of Birmingham, Birmingham (UK)
Building owner: Birmingham City Council (UK)
Architects: Mecanoo, Delft (NL)
Completed: 4/2013
Plumber: EMCOR Group, Birmingham (UK)
Geberit know-how
PE-HD piping systems
Mapress piping systems
Duofix installation systems
Sigma concealed cisterns 12 cm
Actuator plates Bolero

Green building: nominated for BREEAM "Excellent" certification



↑ The architects from Mecanoo designed a fillgree pattern of decorative steel elements for the facade.





↑ The dominant structure blends into the urban context thanks to its striking ringed facade.

ban landscape between Birmingham Repertory Theatre (a building from the 1960s) and the neoclassical facade of Baskerville House, giving the previously uninspiring location a sense of atmosphere and a new identity. With its roof gardens, glass facades and visible courtyards, Mecanoo designed the library as a public building. Despite its voluminous size, the glass structure blends into the urban context in a dominant yet non-oppressive fashion. This is thanks in no small part to the transparent, colored facade featuring a filigree pattern of decorative steel rings – a design element with which the architect Francine Houben of Mecanoo aims to recall the artisan tradition of this once industrial city.

Systematic sustainability

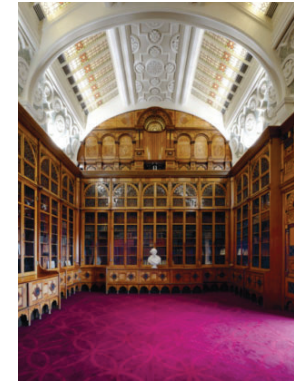
The public library in Birmingham not only distinguishes itself with its outstanding architecture. Thanks to its sustainable concept in the areas of design, material, energy and ecology, it is also nominated for BREEAM "Excellent" certification. An important aspect in this respect is water consumption and recovery, particularly in the toilet facilities. The Geberit products used here – such as the Duofix installation systems and the cisterns with dual flush – contribute significantly to the building meeting the stringent requirements for BREEAM "Excellent" certification.

The largest library in Western Europe

The 35,000-square-meter public library covers an exhaustive array of library and educational uses and even features a community health center, a roof garden and a studio theater that seats up to 300 people. It is currently the largest library in Western Europe. Attracting some 10,000 visitors a day, the library is not only a source of knowledge and culture, it also specifically aims to encourage research and innovation in Birmingham. The eight circular spaces within the building create clear paths through the library. Equipped with diagonal escalators, these "rotundas" also provide natural light and ventilation. At the heart of the building is a large book rotunda which conveys the atmosphere of a traditional



- ← An ensemble of open reading and work areas.
- ↓ The "Shakespeare Memorial Room" is located in the rotunda on the roof.



↑ The 35,000-square-meter public library covers an array of library and educational uses.

reading room while also doubling as a passageway and place where visitors split off to other areas. The roof also houses a very special rotunda which is home to the "Shakespeare Memorial Room". Originally erected in Birmingham's first central library in 1882, this wood-paneled Victorian reading room has been reassembled in this building. Thanks to its prominent position in the golden rotunda, the famous Shakespeare room can even be seen from quite a distance across the city.

A Parisian box of books

Situated to the north of Paris, Saint-Denis-la-Plaine is one of the suburbs characterized by housing developments whose run-down infrastructure is cited as one of the





← A compact cube behind delicate strips of wood – the Mediathèque in Saint-Denis-la-Plaine.

**Mediathèque,
Saint-Denis-la-Plaine (FR)**

Building owner: SEM Plaine Commune, Saint-Denis-la-Plaine (FR)
Architects: Antonini + Darmon Architectes urbanistes, Paris (FR)
Completed: 12/2013
Plumber: E.M.R. company, Coupvray (FR)

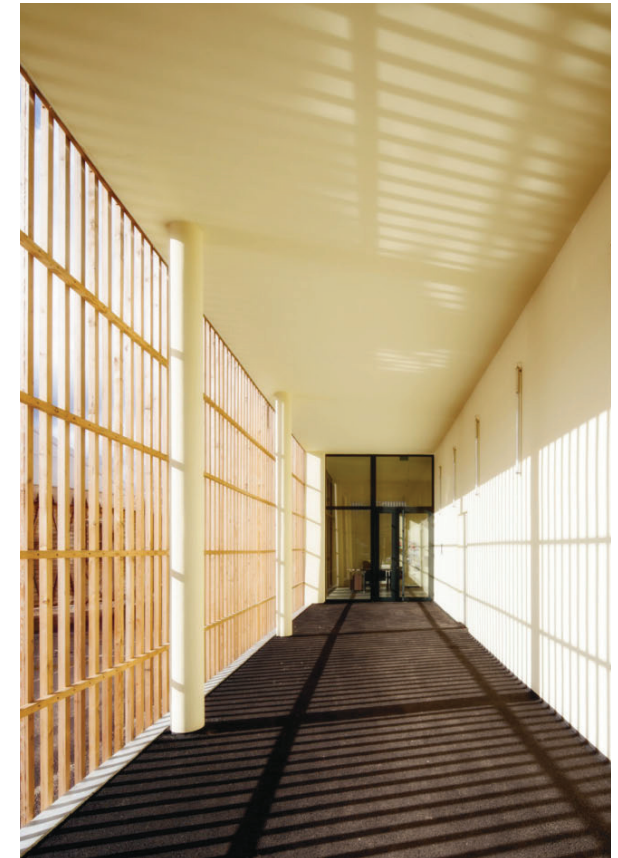
Geberit know-how
Duofix installation systems
Actuator plates Sigma01

reasons for the frequent flaring up of social unrest. Urban planners and architects are now reacting to this situation with a range of measures. These include the development of the new neighborhood Landy-Pleyel, where – among other buildings – a new library with archive rooms has been built. The new building was designed by the Paris-based architecture firm Antonini + Darmon Architectes urbanistes.

The project is a key part of the vision of a future-oriented city which is defined by sustainable development and the implementation of the aspects associated with modern quality of life. As explained by the architects, the library is to be an architectural icon and a symbolic sign on the cityscape. The intention is to help improve the cultural infrastructure with their contemporary design.

Reduced on a monastic scale

The cubic building is clad with delicate vertical strips of wood which give the three-story structure a compact yet light appearance. The ground floor contains the reception area and the garage for mobile libraries that set off from this building. All other areas can be directly reached via a central building core. The first floor houses archive rooms and communal spaces. On the third floor, administrative offices and seminar rooms surround an inner courtyard which allows ample light to flood into the rooms. Although the architecture almost appears somewhat monastic, the library aims to become a place for meeting up and socializing in Saint-Denis-la-Plaine. ←



↑ Due to its simple, restrained architecture, the library almost appears somewhat monastic.