

# ARCHITECTURE M N T

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## INTERIOR MOTIVE

Architects put the public back in public space in vibrant new library and museum interiors.

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## ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Four prominent Minnesota architects consider their work and careers from an artistic perspective.

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## LITERARY BOMBSHELL

A look back at Jane Jacobs' landmark volume *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

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# Building Community

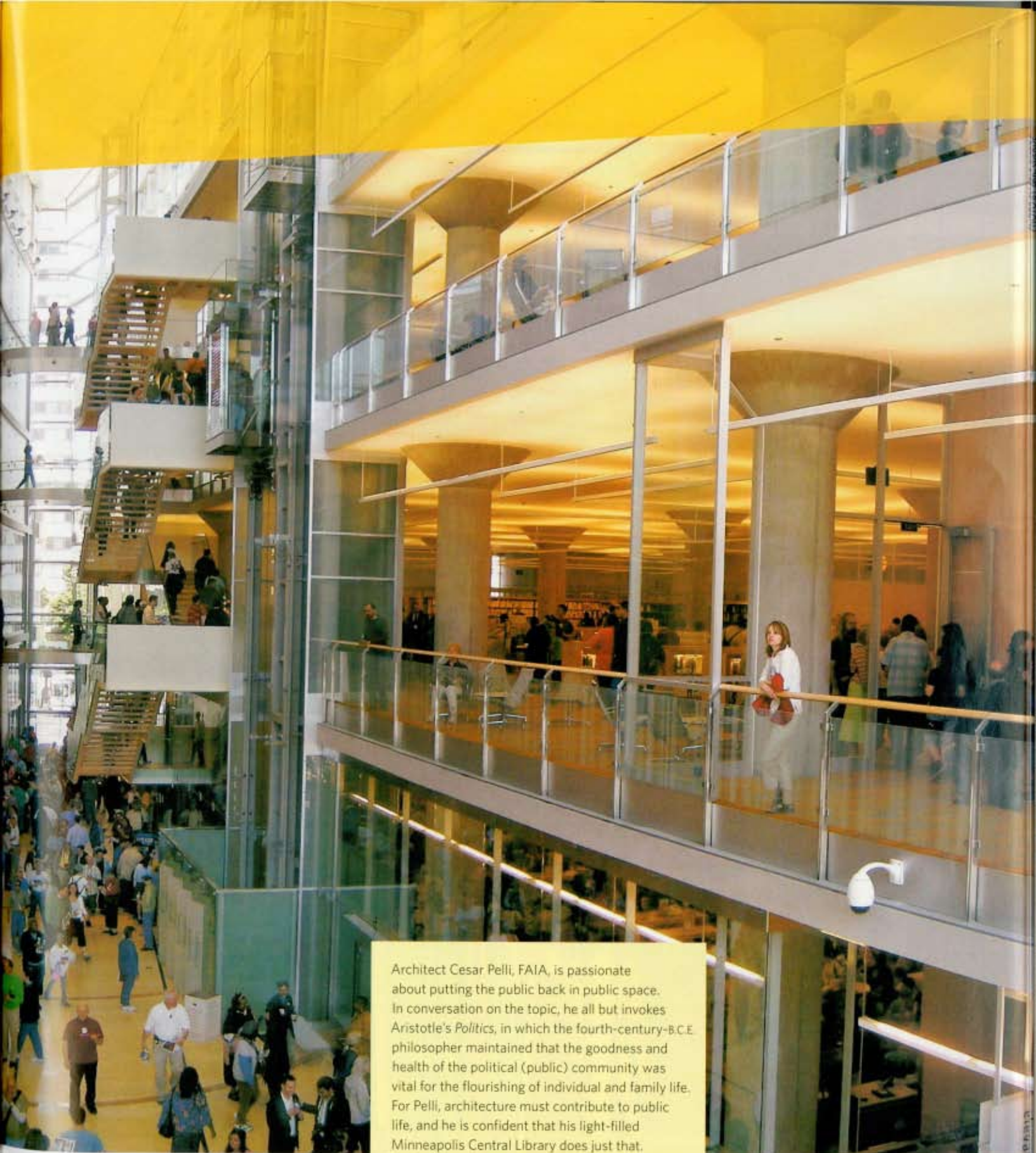
*Lofty, luminous,  
ready for change*

COVER: MINNEAPOLIS  
CENTRAL LIBRARY, PAGE 28

*Awash in natural light, the new Minneapolis Central Library is fast becoming the most popular public space in town*

# Good Day Sunshine

**BY MASON RIDDLE**



Architect Cesar Pelli, FAIA, is passionate about putting the public back in public space. In conversation on the topic, he all but invokes Aristotle's *Politics*, in which the fourth-century-B.C.E. philosopher maintained that the goodness and health of the political (public) community was vital for the flourishing of individual and family life. For Pelli, architecture must contribute to public life, and he is confident that his light-filled Minneapolis Central Library does just that. "It should be clear to everyone that this is an important public space," he declares. "We no longer build grand staircases, but, from the approach, visitors should know that this is an out-of-the-ordinary civic building,"



It's a public space. You can see deep into each floor, and simple, easy-to-read signage guides you into the stacks."

Walter Gegner, director of library operations

PAUL CROSBY, CROSBY STUDIO

*Great sight lines, floor-to-ceiling glazing, maple-vener stacks, and a dash of public art give each floor a spacious feel. The second floor is home to the Cargill Hall Gallery and the science, business, and consumer resources stacks, among others.*



GREG JANSEN PHOTOGRAPHY



Pelli's library, designed in collaboration with local firm Architectural Alliance, is all that a public library should be: open, accessible, and functional. "This place is so democratic it's buzzing," enthuses Architectural Alliance principal Tom Hysell, AIA, sitting in the building's Dunn Bros. coffee shop on Nicollet Mall. Hysell notes that more than 22,000 people attended the grand opening in May 2006. Apparently, the crowds liked what they saw; the library has been brimming with patrons ever since.

## THE INCREDIBLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

Pelli determined the library's slightly unorthodox floor plan after researching the city's original grid, in which streets grew closer as they neared the Mississippi River. The building's two rectangular sections, north and south, sit at a shallow angle, accommodating the differing street plats of Nicollet Mall and Hennepin Avenue. The larger, four-story section to the north—which will eventually be crowned by a 21st-century reincarnation of the much-beloved Planetarium—and the narrower, five-story section to the south are conjoined by Library Commons, a wedge-shaped atrium that runs from the relatively modest Hennepin entrance to the more extroverted Nicollet Mall entry.



PAUL CROSBY, CROSBY STUDIO

*The second-floor, 248-seat Pohlrad Hall, a popular meeting room infused with the same casual elegance as the rest of the library, overlooks Nicollet Mall.*

### MINNEAPOLIS CENTRAL LIBRARY

**Location:**  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Client:**  
City of Minneapolis/  
Minneapolis Library Board

**Design architect:**  
Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects  
[www.pcparch.com](http://www.pcparch.com)

**Architect of record:**  
Architectural Alliance  
[www.archalliance.com](http://www.archalliance.com)

**Landscape architect:**  
Coen + Partners  
[www.coenpartners.com](http://www.coenpartners.com)

**Construction manager:**  
Morrison/Thor

**Size:**  
353,050 square feet

**Project cost:**  
\$138.8 million

**Construction cost:**  
\$87.6 million

**Completion date:**  
May 2006

**Photographer:**  
Paul Crosby, Crosby Studio

"Libraries will become more and more different from what we understand them to be today. We are ready for that evolution."

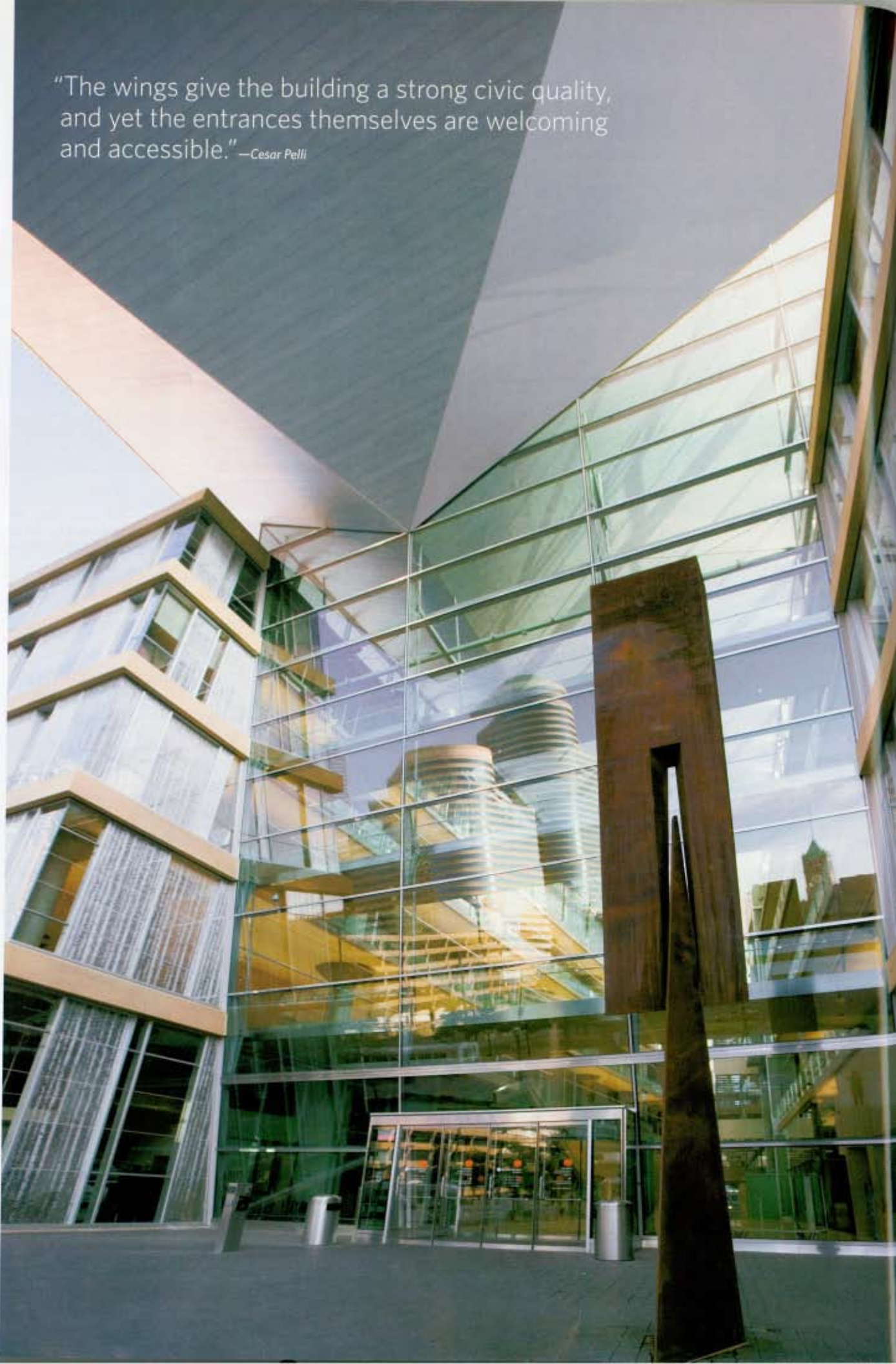
—Architect Cesar Pelli

With all due respect, Library Commons should be renamed the Incredible Lightness of Being. An architectural environment of enveloping light, breathtaking openness, and reflective and transparent surfaces, the Commons soars to the full five-story height of the building. The two glass elevators are faced with pearlescent panels that scroll large LED-lit words (see cover)—artist Ben Ruben designed the installation—and the escalator reveals its machinery through glass side panels. The dramatically cantilevered staircase features glass risers and guardrails. On the first floor, the automated book-return center, library store,

"The wings give the building a strong civic quality, and yet the entrances themselves are welcoming and accessible." —Cesar Pelli

*The Nicollet Mall entrance showcases the signature Galvalume winged roof and the canted glass curtain wall. Beverly Pepper's Ptolemy's Wedge, constructed from 6,200 pounds of oxidized steel, echoes the roofline.*

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*Right: The atrium's height and airiness are accentuated by the four-story cantilevered staircase.*

*Below: The other end of the winged roof shelters the Hennepin Avenue entrance. Teen Central's projecting reading room has a privileged view.*



PAUL CROSBY, CROSBY STUDIO

and coffee shop are all visible through glass walls, and the light-hued Egyptian limestone floor includes an inlaid public artwork by Lita Albuquerque in which marble and granite arcs ripple out from the center of the atrium.

Adding to the airiness are canted east- and west-entrance curtain walls fabricated from low-iron, insulated glazed panels. Both are supported by slender stainless-steel armatures—gravity loaded at the Hennepin entrance and suspended from the wing roof at Nicollet Mall—and contain hot-water pipes that efficiently heat the glass in winter. Traversing the pedestrian bridges (which help support the curtain wall laterally on the Nicollet side) and peering through expanses of ultra-clear glass to the city beyond, visitors may feel as if they are hovering weightlessly. From the uppermost balcony, the comings and goings below look like a scene out of Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*.

And the winged roof? The much-discussed projections, visible from blocks away in both directions, shelter the Nicollet and Hennepin entrances. Clad in a zinc-like Galvalume metal, the wings transition into the atrium's sharply angled "keel" ceiling. "The public library is often the intellectual center of a city, but in Minneapolis the library is geographically more on the edge," Pelli observes. "The wings give the building a strong civic quality, and yet the entrances themselves are welcoming and accessible." The wings also protect the 9,000-square-foot Commons from direct sunlight while allowing indirect light to enter from all sides.

## A MINNESOTA FEEL

Another aesthetic flashpoint is the building's glass-panel cladding. Fabricated in three widths with varying degrees of transparency, the panels sit on concrete-floor slabs that are faced on the exterior with maize-colored Minnesota dolomite limestone. Individual panels are transparent, transparent with frit, or opaque with frit. Not surprisingly, the opaque glass is concentrated on the south wall. To some, the building appears in need of a major dusting; to others, the frit creates a pixilated, high-tech look, especially on the interior.

And, yes, you are seeing things: Each fritted wall is themed. Look closely and you'll start to make out prairie grass (Hennepin Avenue/west side), water ripples (river/north side), white birches (Nicollet Mall/east side), and snow on tree branches (Fourth Street/south side). Clichéd Minnesota nice? Perhaps. But for Pelli, the fritted



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GREG JANSEN PHOTOGRAPHY

The colorful first-floor children's library features giant bugs and an interactive learning wall. There are even giant-sized computer stations for curious little minds.



## TOTS AND TEENS

Interactive Discovery Wall, a moving floor diorama, and a puppet theater. The first-floor Children's Library, flooded with light, has these amenities and more in a rainbow palette. Wood columns with angled appendages suggest an abstract forest. The carpeted floor can be a game, and the core-book bins are sailboats. Large bentwood dragonflies with 4-foot wingspans cut the air. Playful sculptures perch on bookshelves. "The dragonflies look like they've been caught mid-flight," says Architectural

Alliance project manager Nina Ebbighausen, AIA. "A geologist friend of mine says prehistoric dragonflies were nearly this size. This is exactly the kind of wonder we wanted to inspire in the kids who use this library." There are even cushy couches for adults.

If the Children's Library is animated, Teen Central is way cool. The unconventional second-floor space is sophisticated yet

engaging with a close-up view of the lower green roof. Teens wishing to express themselves can do so on the meeting room's graffiti wall. MP3-player hookups allow for sharing music with friends through directional speakers floating above amoeba-shaped listening stations. Designer ceiling lights and beanbag chairs add to the appeal.

But the really "tight" feature is the serpentine tamo-wood-veneer bookshelf in a rich red stain. "The top projects out farther than the bench base, so the shelf is liquid in both plan and section," explains Ebbighausen. "Lights are set vertically between each

shelf section, giving it a cool, urban feel. The millworkers did a fantastic job constructing such a complex object."

For Pelli, the fritted panels offer another “element of communication, consciously or unconsciously connecting the visitor to the site.”

PAUL CROSBY, CROSBY STUDIO



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The fritted glass also reduces glare and solar gain while harnessing “passive energy that reduces energy needs tremendously,” Pelli enthuses. Impressively, 96 percent of the old building was recycled, and, thanks to the new building’s energy-efficient physical plant and materials, each floor needs to be heated or cooled only up to eight feet. The rest takes care of itself. Green roofs on the second and fifth floors retain 60 percent of rainwater and reduce the amount of heat reflected into the atmosphere. According to Hysell, the library exceeds current energy-code standards by 30 percent.

If the building’s exterior is humming Vivaldi’s “The Four Seasons,” then the interior is belting out the Beatles’ “Good Day Sunshine.” The luminous spaces are in near-perfect harmony, lively but rational, expansive yet intimate, and exceedingly

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**Above:** Tableau: A Native American Mosaic by the late George Morrison originally graced Nicollet Mall in front of the IDS Tower. Featuring 14 different colors of granite, the piece was moved to the library site following water seepage problems.

**Left (top and bottom):** Teen Central boasts a curving tamo-wood-vener bookshelf, music-listening stations, designer lighting, and beanbag chairs.



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## Good Day Sunshine

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well organized. Each easy-to-navigate floor sports a different-colored geometric-pattern carpet; getting around one floor ensures the same for the other three, as the layouts are nearly identical. The smaller south section hosts, on various floors, the 248-seat Pohlad Auditorium, community rooms, staff facilities, administration, and technical assistance areas such as the fifth-floor book repair and bindery. "We do about 400 repairs a week," reports bookbinder Frank Hurley. "We now have so much more space in which to work. And the natural light is amazing."

The larger north section is home to discrete resource areas such as Art & Music and Science & Technology, and to destination spots such as Periodicals and the Gallery. On the fourth floor, an elaborately carved wood portal frames the entrance to the Athenaeum and Special Collections. The relic was saved from Minneapolis' original 1889 Long & Kees Richardsonian Romanesque library, which, up until its 1961 demise, held court at the intersection of Tenth Street and Hennepin Avenue.

Bustling human activity on each floor is moderated by interior design amenities such as maple veneer

wall paneling and shelves, and modern reading desks and chairs. Each floor's fireplace, ringed by snooze-friendly upholstered chairs, is sheathed in Minnesota dolomite limestone. With comfortable seating and public art on every floor, the library is more living room than institution.

## READY FOR CHANGE

"We opted for simple generic spaces, not ones that fit like a glove," explains Pelli. "The trick was to make them handsome." Taking his cue from nearby loft and warehouse buildings, Pelli created loft spaces with widely spaced, cast-concrete mushroom columns that require no support beams. Raised-access floors conceal yet provide easy access to all cable, power, data, and sprinkler systems. As the library's needs change, spaces can be reconfigured without tearing down walls or uprooting technical systems. Information desks are accessible, shelving units are mobile, the height of staff desks can be raised and lowered, digital signage is easily changed, and free WiFi is available throughout the building. "Those who have predicted the complete demise of the library are wrong," Pelli argues. "It's just that libraries will become more and more different from what we understand them to be today. We are ready for that evolution."

Walter Gegner, director of library operations, describes the new facility as an "enormous improvement on the old. By leaps and bounds it is more flexible than the old building." Upon entering each floor, patrons first encounter lower open tables and computer stations, then open stacks, then comfortable reading tables and chairs on the periphery. "It's a public space. You can see deep into each floor, and simple, easy-to-read signage guides you into the stacks," says Gegner. "As collections grow, it is increasingly difficult for people to find what they want on their own. Here, the space is accessible; virtually all of the stacks are available on each floor. People should be able to find what they need with little staff assistance."

Library director Kit Hadley stepped into the middle of the building process when she assumed her post in March 2003. "I'm not an architect, but the building is working brilliantly," she raves. "Our hopes have been realized." The chess players are returning, people are reading around the fireplaces, and young children and teens are devouring their custom-designed spaces. Downtown workers stop in for coffee and shop in the store. "It's really about what happens in the library and what happens in the community because of the library," says Hadley. "The design is based on function, which makes the building extremely easy to navigate. It's a simple design that is highly flexible." **AMN**