

ARCHITECTURE

Incorporating Architectural Technology May 1989 Twelve Dollars





'Practical, Unpretentious, Open, and Family Oriented'

Clayton County, Ga., Library, Scogin Elam & Bray.
By Allen Freeman

Scogin Elam & Bray has won its second honor award in as many years for works that scarcely look related. Last year's winner was the High Museum at Georgia-Pacific Center, a controlled, compressed, and highly crafted cluster of intimate, interlocking galleries and ramps in an Atlanta skyscraper. This year's winner is a suburban library with an exploded form and an industrial esthetic. Despite their differences, the two works are alike in that they avoid historical allusion and are nonliteral responses to their very different contexts.

Clayton County is where Margaret Mitchell imagined Tara to be in *Gone with the Wind* and where Atlanta built Hartsfield International Airport. The library is part of an accreting light-industrial strip that hasn't yet reached the prevailing U.S. standard of mass-produced monotony, where "one is apt to pull alongside a pickup with a rack and ZZ Top blasting through open windows," as Merrill Elam, AIA, observes. In this context, she says, her firm's 33,000-square-foot library, costing a modest \$68 per square foot, is a "filling station for living life, [providing] a puppet show, a cooking class, a seed catalogue, easy parking."

Seemingly born of free association, the exuberant facades spread under piney woods like suburbia itself. The rectilinear light tower suggests air control functions, and the roof rises in aeronautical forms. The splotchy black and white corrugated

metal siding connotes library boxes. And finishes and exposed steel framing are factory grade.

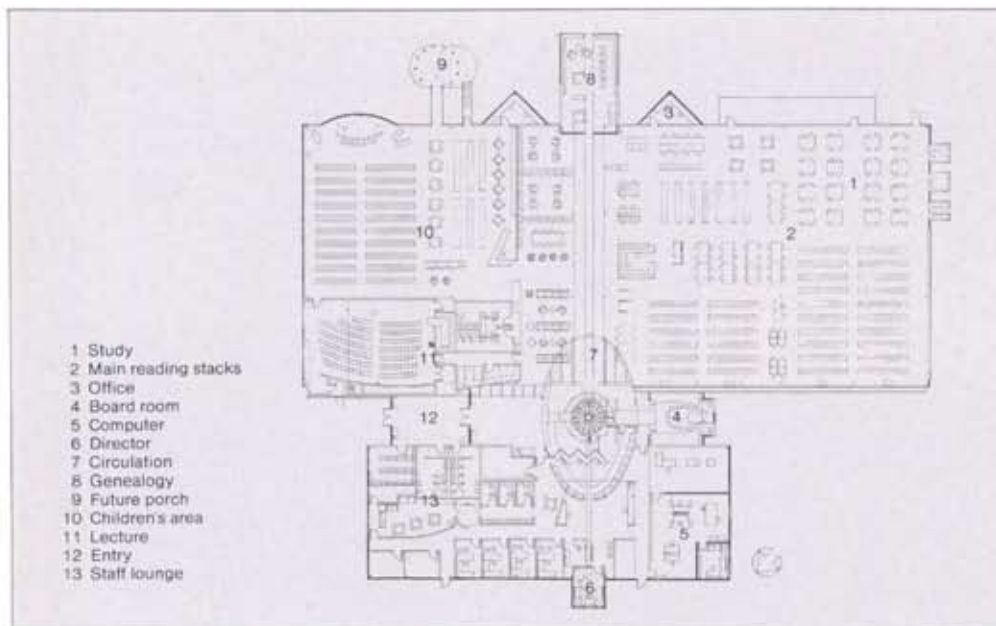
Despite its unconventionality, says library director Carol Stewart, the building reflects the largely blue-collar Clayton County and its people because it is practical, unpretentious, open, and family oriented. She says the interior design is largely self-explanatory, even to first-time users, and lends itself to minimal staffing, that the stadium-type uplighting fixtures with metal halide lamps provide almost ideal, even illumination with little glare or shadow, and that the building is quiet even when filled with users. The interior is almost universally liked, Stewart says, and she is especially pleased that young people hang out there. Some older residents, however, have not warmed to the spirited facades.

The honor award jurors said, "This startling building defies the notion that libraries are stuffy places. . . . [It] bursts with movement and life."

Above, the entrance facade faces north, with an axis running from the freestanding tower up the steps to the circulation desk directly under the rectilinear light tower. Facing page: below, a satellite dish-cum-chandelier is suspended under the light tower; above, story time in a bowed facade of the children's area at the northeast corner of the building.

Photographs © Timothy Hursley





Left, the main reading room in the building's southeast corner. Below left, a trio of windowed study cubicles on the south wall. Right, the periodical area adjacent to the major east-west axis. Bowed warren trusses have wood cords and galvanized steel webs; lights are standard stadium fixtures. □



Photographs © Timothy Hursley