Peckham rise

Peckham Library Alsop & Störmer has created a local landmark which is designed to appeal to local residents and their children.

By Jeremy Mewin. Photographs by James Morris.
Peckham Library
Alsop & Störmer

working details

On the ground floor of the library is a large double-high 'one-stop shop' which offers advice on council services and Internet access to residents. It contains a freestanding two-storey 'pod' which stands behind a sinuously curved reception desk unit fitted with computer terminals. The tulip-shaped pod contains an interview room on ground floor level and a storage space above, reached by a timber staircase.

Gowley Timberwork, a structural timber specialist, fabricated the pod using CAD software to create 3D drawings (shown right) and the complex setting-out geometry. The pod is formed from a series of paired 150 x 35mm softwood timber ribs, pre-curved to create the shape and lined on the inside with 6mm fibre board and on the outside with a double layer of oriented strand board (OSB). An external skin of stained 1.5mm plywood was then stapled to the exterior OSB layer. The first floor of the pod comprises panels of timber joints stiffened with a chipboard floor and fibreboard soffit. A wavy rim at the perimeter of the pod comprises three 4mm MDF strips pre-curved and laminated together.

The staircase is a stringless folded plate structure of solid Douglas fir. Treads and risers were finger-jointed together in 50mm wide strips and pressure glued with a hydraulic ram. The strips were then jointed and glued.

The curved reception desk has a ply sub-structure bonded with a pre-formed ply skin and clad with a 6mm stained ply tiles. Its bulbous ends were formed of polystyrene, lightly sanded and coated with a liquid epoxy resin which provided a thick surface to which ply tiles could be bonded.

Susan Dawson
STRUCTURE

At Peckham Library, the architects demanded exhilarating potentials of a structure, basing on the form revolutionary but resulting in a form that is easily legible. The structural strength from the high degrees of interdependence among elements of appropriate materials.

The horizontal block forms the main floor, used for the main floor, supported by structural steel columns. The diagonal bracing in the concrete frame solution was an unusual circular truss, allowing columns of up to 8m at the top of the 'beret'.

A canopy extends over the main floor, supported by a 3m cantilever from exposed concrete columns. The curved vertical ribs in an interesting connection between the external walls and internal skinning columns.

Overhead, at mezzanine level, two bays rest on tripods. The central mezzanine benefits from natural light, and a single storey level is adjacent. Other functions on the ground, while the mezzanine on the first floor has been completed, significant work at North Greenwich station that is a part of the overall buildings.

The library design generally maps out the engagement with the site, starting to become social as well as building. There is a clear definition of the reading room in the ground floor and the library as a place of avoiding a pedestrian area, both underground and the sky.

Coloured illumination makes the library an obvious local landmark by day and by night. The deep overhang gives a large covered area which relates to the collection of public features at the foot of Peckham Rye.
The mezzanine level at two levels above ground level contains an impressive range of books and reading areas. The library is rich in Caribbean literature, with a section dedicated to children's books and a play area.

The building's design is both literal and physical, with the library being the centerpiece. The central atrium is a massive space with a high ceiling, allowing natural light to flood in from the windows. The library is arranged around this open space, creating a sense of community and connection between the users.

The library is designed to be more than just a collection of books. It is a place of learning, exploration, and creativity. The layout encourages interaction and collaboration, with areas dedicated to group study and quiet reading. The library is also equipped with computer terminals and Wi-Fi, allowing patrons to access information and resources from anywhere in the building.

The library's design is inspired by the idea of a library as a social space. It is a place where people come together to learn, share knowledge, and develop new ideas. The library is not just a place of information, but a place of discovery and innovation.
One of the problems with buildings, says Will Alsop's old mentor Cedric Price, is that you have to walk around them. Even before you've had a chance to look at them, to appreciate the delights they offer or to inspect their proportional systems and axial relations, they have incurred so much irritation. Alsop relates this while talking about the Peckham Library's unusual composition - a bookend, as it were, with one end resting on the ground and the other balanced on a set of extraordinarily slender and surprisingly angled columns some 12m up. The deep overhang is a large covered area. Some under the public features at the foot of Peckham Rye, the Trafalgar MacAslan Arch, Southwark Council's own architects' Pulse (a health and fitness centre) and now the library. But Alsop stresses the way it feeds a network of routes into the Peckham hinterland. No one has to walk around his building - it is all the footprints remarkably small - but they can walk to it, congregate around it and choose whether or not to enter it.

This is a public building with a difference. Most institutions demand entrance, either through an intimidating portico or by a kind of shallow dog-leg where you're already on the ramp to the library foyer or public art observation platform before you realise that it doesn't lead to the pub after all. In either case the act of and invitation to enter depends on the manipulation of a code, either visual or physical. Alsop plays with other sorts of codes. In part, they are latent within the possibilities of the locality - whether the physical links that beg to be made, or the patterns of use - and in part in the building's purpose. In a sense this is going back to the naive roots of architecture, a mythical period when social structures were so clear that nothing could be built which was not immediately comprehensible. Following this line, style is the social contract which allows all sorts of shortcuts to generate common understanding when life becomes a little more complicated, bringing order, objective authenticity and for repetition seems the only option. Alsop is not so naive a vision of the Peckham Library. If the raw material is to revive this mythical, pre-national age of social realism and interior control, then his experience is about 'indulging in design workshop projects', as he puts it. The transformation of the site began, with Southwark Council's director of regeneration,连锁 the initiative to regenerate the area with help from the what you know in architecture, a regeneration budget. The Arch and Library was built on a grid, but Alsop points out, it still sits in a high street. Yet it still remains of the borough's northern end the halls.

Peckham Library's unusual composition is reminiscent of a bookend. It is resting on a set of slender and surprisingly angled columns.

Peckham Library's unusual composition is reminiscent of a bookend with one end resting on the floor and the other balanced on a set of slender and surprisingly angled columns.