

A GLOWING RESOURCE



Los Gatos Public Library Los Gatos, California Noll & Tam Architects/ Illuminosa

By Lamar Anderson

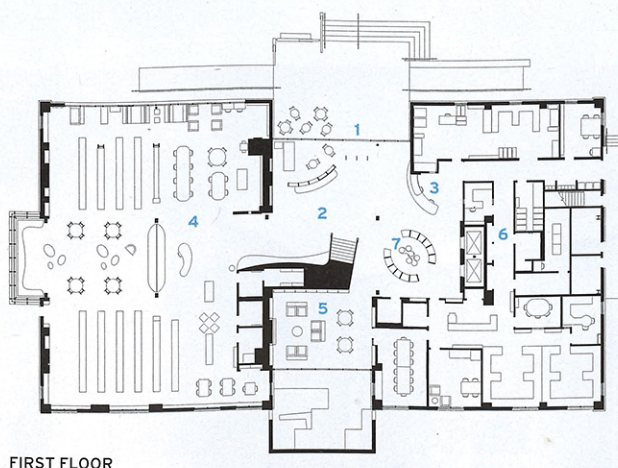
COMMUNITY BEACON Like a lantern in the woods, the modern library is visible from a distance despite a setback site and plentiful tree cover. The design team infused the LEED Gold-certified building with carefully shaded daylight and installed an energy-efficient lighting system that enhances the user experience and establishes a welcome presence in the community as it radiates a gentle luminance.

WITH AN expansive glazed facade and warm wood ceilings that subtly reflect light, the Los Gatos Public Library emits a soft glow at all waking hours, but the best time to see it is at dusk. That's when the lighting program switches on and slowly sends a wash of amber (or blue or purple) across a band of frosted-glass panels tucked at the base of the second-floor windows. The color change, which spreads from the center of the facade outward, takes about 40 minutes to complete and happens almost imperceptibly. It's the kind of touch that helps the already lamplike library advertise itself as a beacon for this small, mountain-edged city south of San Francisco Bay. The stretch of glass that houses RGB color-changing LEDs was originally meant to be empty, a leftover space from the raised-

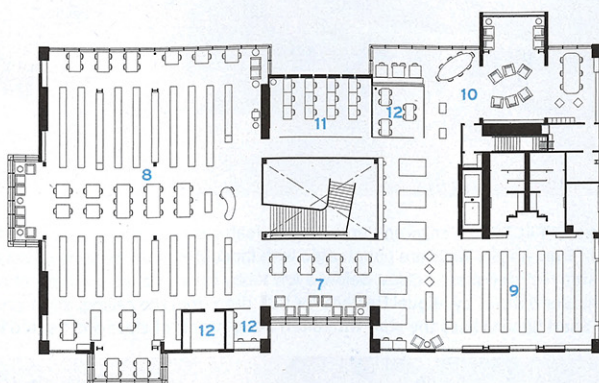
floor ventilation and electrical system. "We were just going to put a blank thing there," recalls Chris Noll, principal of the Berkeley, California-based firm Noll & Tam Architects. "And I went, 'Oh, I want to do something with that. Why don't we have some fun?'"

Working with Illuminosa lighting consultants, the architects chose the concept of a lantern in the woods for the usual associations between knowledge and light, but also to help the public see the building on a site with a large setback and ample tree cover. They designed the steel-frame building as a long, transparent rectangle and oriented the facade to capture northern light. At two stories and 30,250 square feet, the LEED Gold-certified library triples the size of its old quarters inside the neighboring civic center. The new building,

- 1 ENTRANCE
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 CIRCULATION DESK
- 4 CHILDREN'S LIBRARY
- 5 PERIODICALS
- 6 ADMINISTRATION
- 7 LOUNGE
- 8 NONFICTION/HISTORY
- 9 FICTION
- 10 TEEN LIBRARY
- 11 TECHNOLOGY LAB
- 12 WORK/STUDY ROOMS



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



LIGHT LINE The architects inserted a 35-foot-high central spine along the length of the structure and installed clerestory windows on either side to bring light all the way through the core of the 175-foot-long building. Comfortable, pop-out reading rooms are surrounded by louvered windows, which provide sun and heat protection as well as a bit of privacy.

which opened in February 2012, includes stacks and storage for the library's 120,000-item collection, a children's library, a reading room, a computer lab, and a community meeting room, as well as a teen center and a local-history section that pop out from the north and south facades, respectively, in a matched pair of cantilevered bay windows.

In keeping with the woodsy setting, the architects surfaced the facade with a natural palette of stone veneer, wood-veneer composite paneling, and ceramic tile. These choices, though, almost read as the backdrop for the interior of the library, whose light-washed maple ceilings seem to push out through the windows and become part of the exterior. "You don't see the vertical surfaces when you're approaching the building; you see the lit ceilings," says Alice Prussin, principal of Illuminosa. "If there's light bathing those surfaces, that is what reflects through the windows."

Though the wide site gave the architects an ideal north-south orientation, the designers needed to bring light all the way through the 175-foot-long building. They solved this problem by inserting a tall central spine along the length of the structure, 35 feet above the ground floor. Then they lined the length of the raised roof with clerestory windows that bring



daylight into the core. Lower wings on either side provide cozy dropped ceilings over the stacks that enable the light from recessed fluorescent strips to reach the bottom shelves. Along the north and south faces of the building, the ceiling kicks back up a foot to boost the amount of daylight at the perimeter. As dusk approaches, additional fluorescent ceiling fixtures, on dimming and sensor controls, gradually illuminate the extended window walls. "You need a space that's filled with light to make the building glow," says Noll. "If we brought the stacks out to the edge, it wouldn't work as a concept."

Punctuating the rows of stacks, large, loopy wood-veneer fixtures by Spanish designer Miguel Herranz hang from the ceiling. "With such a long spine, you want to help people be aware of the whole volume but not make it seem too narrow," says Prussin. On the ground level, the children's library gets even more playful. Because of structural beams above the ceiling here, the architects couldn't jack up the height the way they did on the floor above. Instead they captured the space between the beams with a custom-fabricated undulating aluminum ceiling. Cutouts of spaceships and galaxies, backlit by yellow pendant fixtures, give the room a celestial theme.

It was the library-as-lantern approach that helped sell the tradition-minded town on a modern building, says Noll. "They were going, 'Ahh! It's going to be steel and glass and stone; it's going to be cold and modern and not inviting,'" he recalls. "The lighting is a big part of achieving that warm and welcoming feeling. So we got a very modern building past the design-review people." ■

credits

ARCHITECT: Noll & Tam Architects – Christopher Noll, principal in charge; Dannielle Sergent, design project manager; Abraham Jayson, construction manager; Matthew Wadlund, project designer; Tad Costerison, project architect; Trina Goodwin, interiors architect

LIGHTING DESIGNER: Illuminosa – Alice Prussin, principal

ENGINEERS: Ingraham DeJesse Associates (structural); Glumac (m/e/p); Sandis (civil)

SIZE: 30,250 gross square feet

COST: \$12.7 million

COMPLETION DATE: February 2012

SOURCES

LIGHTING: Zumtobel, Linear, Vode, Peerless (linear); Lighting Quotient (uplights); Finelite, Philips (cove); Amerlux, Vode (task); Kurt Versen, Lightolier, Gotham (downlights); LZP, Poulsen, Limberg, Bruck (decorative); Bega, Versen, Winona, HDI, Philips (exterior)



SPECIAL EFFECTS The children's area (above) features an undulating aluminum ceiling with an outer-space theme lit from above. Walls are punctuated with fanciful, circular reading nooks and sconces backed by illuminated recycled-plastic discs. Below, a low lobby ceiling opens suddenly onto a two-story main staircase. Wood-veneer fixtures by Miguel Herranz for LZP drop from the ceiling, and a crystalline, double-height art wall by Sheri Simons lines the stair with alternating panels of clear and frosted etched glass.

