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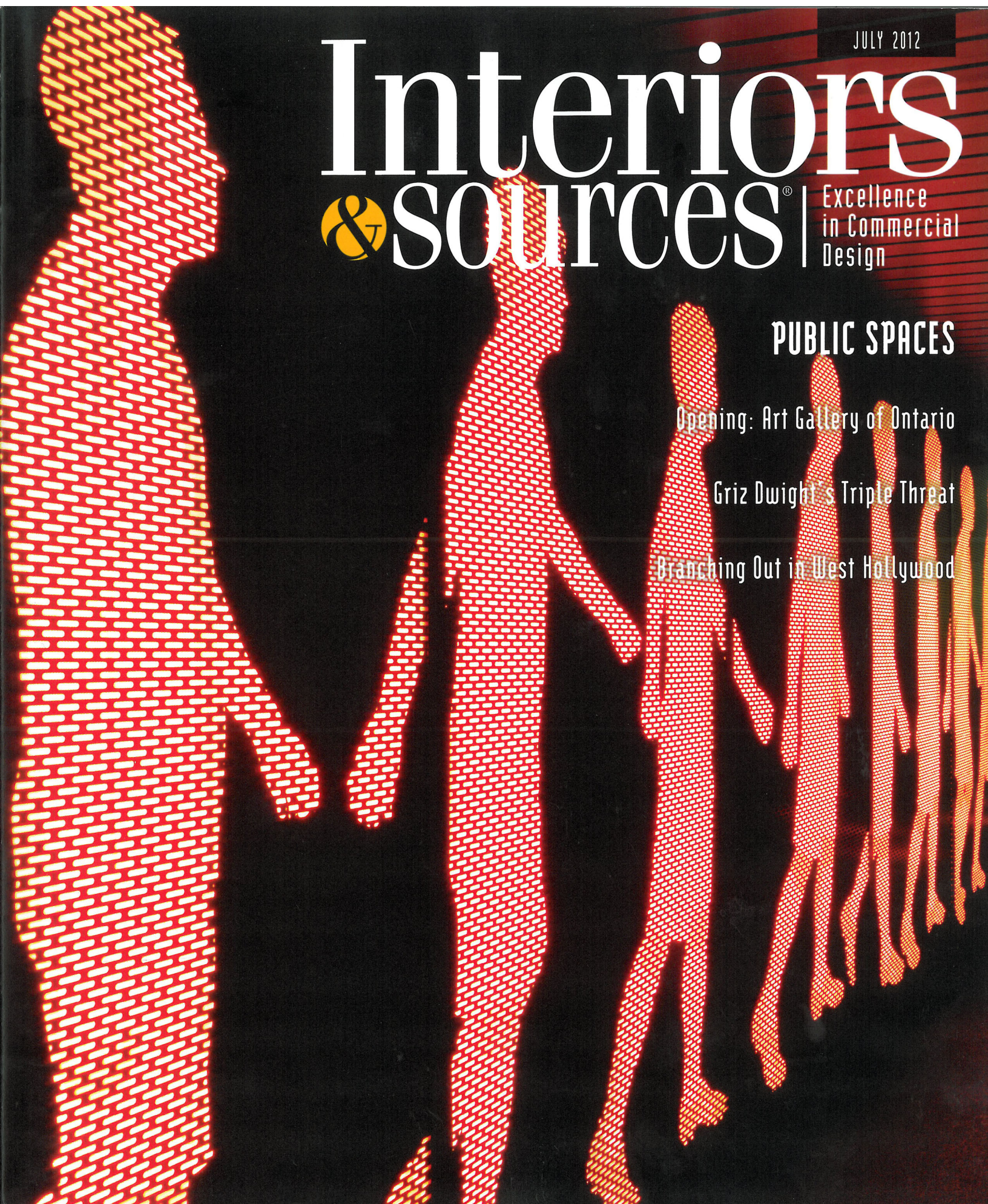
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Griz Dwight's Triple Threat

Branching Out in West Hollywood






ABOVE + INSET As the first phase of the master plan for West Hollywood Park, the newly designed public library meets the city's goals for a larger, state-of-the-art facility and increased open park space.



Branching Out

The newly designed West Hollywood Library by Johnson Favaro weaves together library, civic and community functions in a space that both respects the past and looks to the future—all while earning LEED Gold in the process.



In Joyce Kilmer's famous poem, "Trees," the author artfully expresses the beauty of nature's form, and contrasts it to the inadequacy of human expression and verse.

Yet, the connection between the written word and the natural world abounds within untold volumes of books lining the shelves of libraries across the globe.

It's fitting, then, that the new West Hollywood Library, designed by Culver City, Calif.-based Johnson Favaro, was born in a park and bears the hallmarks of its natural surroundings. Charged with expanding the existing 5,000-square-foot library to a 32,000-square-foot facility within the city's largest park—yet constrained by a city ordinance that forbids converting park space to any other use than recreation—the design team proposed a comprehensive master plan for West Hollywood Park at the city's request.

"The point of the master plan was to give the city everything that it wanted, which was larger, state-of-the-art facilities, but also to actually

WEST HOLLYWOOD LIBRARY

increase park open space," explains Steve Johnson, AIA, principal at Johnson Favaro. "We did that by essentially employing more urban strategies of stacking functions vertically, rather than spreading out horizontally."

As the first phase of Johnson Favaro's plan, the library's mixed-use program has been stacked on a consolidated footprint, increasing adjacent open park space by 1.5 acres. The new library sits on the upper two floors of the three-story building, with the second floor lifted above the street level while at grade with the expanded park.

The ground floor of the building is home to West Hollywood's 165-seat city council chambers, which was designed to double as a venue for community events and performances. The ground floor also houses the city's public access television station; the Friends of the Library bookstore; and a sidewalk coffee shop that fronts San Vicente Boulevard, serving the library and the surrounding neighborhood businesses.

The upper level acts as the community living room, with all the various functions of a collections floor, including shelving for over 150,000 volumes, reference services, technology stations, group study rooms, printing services, readers' seating and special collections. Designed to accommodate community-based programs and services, the second floor also includes the Wells Fargo Career Development Center, digital media collections, a 90-seat community meeting room, a teen resource and reading area, and a children's library.

In an age of rapidly-advancing technology where information is literally available at everyone's fingertips, Johnson recalls a number of people asking him during the design and construction of the project why the city was spending money on a library. According to Johnson, those who questioned the need for a new library overlooked its true function and meaning to the community.

"[A] library is more than just a bunch of books; it is truly a place where the community gathers. And in fact, it's a place where architecture sort of represents the value they place on reading and literacy," he explains.

The design team looked to some of the most notable reading rooms of the early 20th century—including those at the New York and Boston Public Libraries—for inspiration and help in communicating that a library is not merely a warehouse for storing books, but rather "an evocative place that really does prompt you to leave your computer terminal at home and join your neighbors in a building," Johnson says.

Taking its cues from these iconic reading rooms, the West Hollywood Library features a monumental, hand-made bamboo coffered ceiling in a floral pattern of leaves, petals and vines that was inspired by photographic images by Robert Mapplethorpe, as well as the floral forms developed in the decorative arts during the Art Nouveau period. Johnson says the 3.5-foot-deep ceiling was an immense undertaking that would not have been possible to design and document without a computer, but was truly built by hand.

"If you witnessed the craftsmen who were actually shaping and bending and properly finishing all of those wood pieces—which really do come in in pieces—you really can't appreciate that there is no machine out there that simply stamps a ceiling like that. This really is the 21st century's version of wood-carving craftsmen that date back for centuries," he says.

In keeping with the city's moniker as the "Creative City," the library is home to two major interior art installations by renowned artists



● ABOVE + BELOW The ceiling of abstract floral forms rendered in wood (above) is contrasted by the literal sycamore tree installation (below) by artist David Wiseman, which emerges from the walls of the main staircase and climbs 60 feet up to the skylight.





• **ABOVE** The library features a monumental, hand-made bamboo coffered ceiling in a floral pattern inspired by photography by Robert Mapplethorpe, as well as the decorative arts during the Art Nouveau period.

• **BELOW** The library communicates the idea that it is not merely a warehouse for storing books, but a place where architecture represents the value a community places on reading and literacy.



Shepard Fairey—best known for his iconic President Obama “Hope” poster—and David Wiseman. Fairey’s “Peace, Freedom and Creativity” mural in the lobby of the council chambers is a historic and architectural portrait of the city, while Wiseman’s “Plantus bibliotechalis” sycamore tree installation brings the park indoors, emerging from the walls of the main staircase and climbing 60 feet up to the skylight.

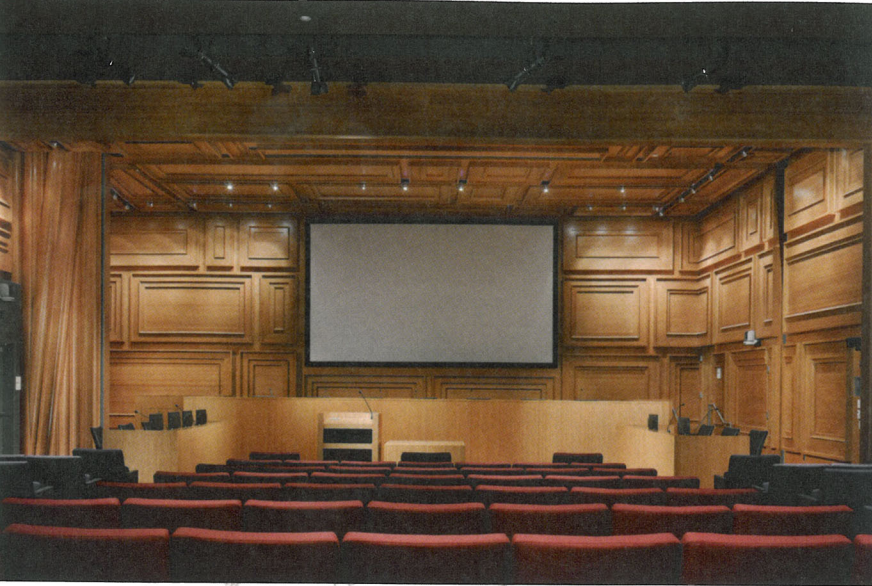
“Whereas our ceiling is somewhat abstract floral forms rendered in wood, [Wiseman] made an actual tree form all in white, kind of imagining that there was an ancient tree that existed where the library was being built,” says Johnson.

The connection to (and respect for) nature is expressed not only in the language of art, but also in the architecture and design of the space. Having earned LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, 96 percent of the library’s construction waste was diverted from landfills and more than 25 percent of all construction materials were sourced locally. The majority of wood used for the project is from renewable, sustainably-managed forests.

Other sustainable features include: a photovoltaic system; use of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58

WEST HOLLYWOOD LIBRARY




LEFT + ABOVE The 165-seat city council chambers on the ground floor also serves as a venue for community events (left); artist Shepard Fairey's "Peace, Freedom and Creativity" mural (above) in the lobby of the council chambers is a historic and architectural portrait of the city.

low-emitting materials for paints, coatings and carpeting; optimized energy performance systems for lighting, heating and ventilation; sustainable vegetation; and the use of green housekeeping products.

Standing in stark contrast to the natural aesthetic of the surrounding library is perhaps the most striking space within the project: The Children's Storytime Theater. Contained in an enormous plywood shipping crate, the Theater serves as a unique theater-within-a-library for storytelling, puppet shows and displays. The space evokes the first library of the Italian Renaissance—Michelangelo's Laurentian Library—and exposes children to the classical language of architecture, says Johnson.

"We're of the attitude that if you don't bring these things forward in your own work in architecture and art, over a couple of generations, it's lost forever," he suggests. "But we do think it was an interesting counterpoint to do the room as a fun teaching moment for children in the middle of this contemporary library."

Ultimately, however, the library is neither modern nor traditional, according to firm principal Jim Favaro, AIA. "It neither waxes nostalgic about yesterday nor pretends to determine a future over which we have no control. As a building that belongs to the community, its architecture has been crafted to project civility, hospitality, creativity and durability in a way that nevertheless reflects the way we aspire to live now—relaxed not formal, tempered not hysterical, dignified not pompous," he says.

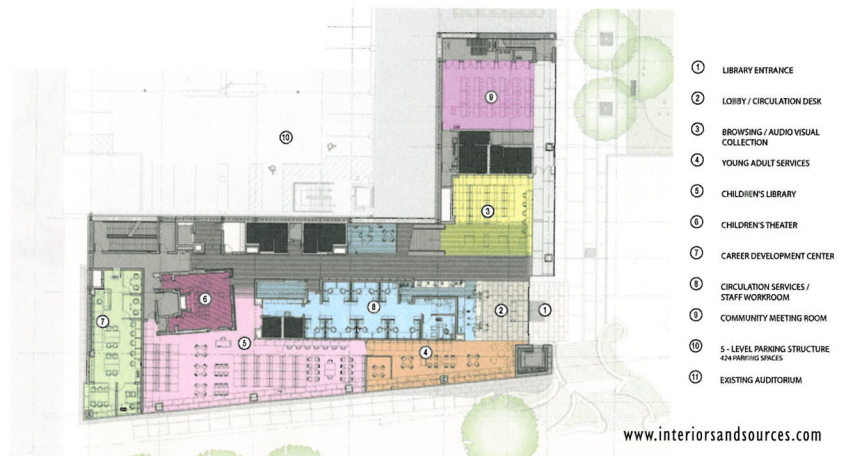
"We oblige ourselves and the community we serve to create an architecture that is of its time and that will stand the test of time." 

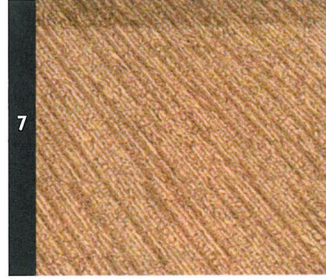
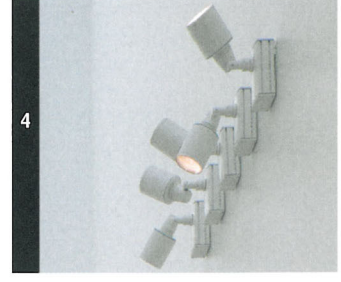
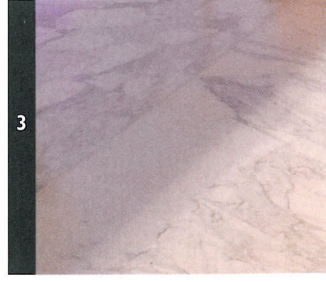
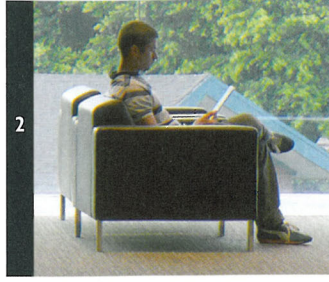


ABOVE The white ceilings at the entrance mimic the floral patterns seen in the library's wood ceiling and provide an introduction to the interiors.



Additional photography is available in our digital edition at www.interiorsandsources.com





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