

The fate of Modern buildings depends heavily on how they're regarded by their owners and users—particularly when increased demand calls for a larger facility. For a branch library in Greenwich, CT, community appreciation was behind a successful expansion that saved a modest but architecturally significant public building.

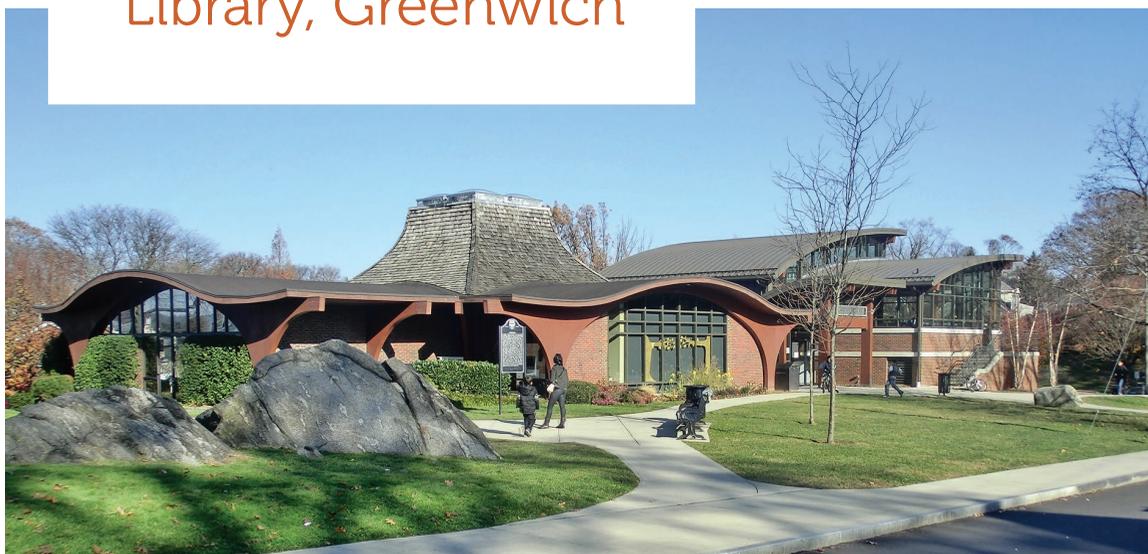
Completed in 1974, the Byram Shubert Library displayed an unconventional variety of Modernism. With intricately curved forms laid out in a cruciform

shore of Long Island Sound, as did Kerttu Shubert, who provided major funding for the building in memory of her husband, theater owner and operator John Shubert. Christensen had earlier explored the formal potentials of curved glulam framing, notably in the 1967 Perkins Study Center at Riverdale Country School in The Bronx.

Although the Byram area is dense by suburban standards, the plot for the little library was relatively generous, since it had been the site of a public school, by then replaced with a new building on an adjoining parcel. The library and the school have remained closely related facilities.

Originally, the building was entered along one of its axes, facing a main desk under its central skylight. Shelving and reading tables extended out toward the glazed ends of the building's other three arms. By the early 2000s, the popularity

PRESERVATION BY EXPANSION: Byram Shubert Library, Greenwich



Byram Shubert Library. Original building at left, R. Marshal Christensen, architect, 1974, Greenwich, CT. Addition at right, Peter Gisolfi Associates, 2009. Photo: John Morris Dixon.

plan, the building was framed with boldly exposed laminated wood (glulam) members. It had become a landmark of the town's Byram neighborhood, an area that was tightly built up over a century ago as a working-class enclave. A substantial proportion of Byram's current residents are Hispanic.

The library's original architect, R. Marshal Christensen, reportedly lived nearby along the

of the library was overtaxing its 5,500 square feet of interior space. When the adjacent elementary school let out, a rush of children made it hard to accommodate all of the library's users.

A substantial part of the addition's cost was met with contributions, as with the original building. To design it, the responsible committee of the Greenwich Library chose the Westchester County

firm of Peter Gisolfi Associates, which is widely experienced in the renovation and expansion of institutional buildings.

Because the property allowed for expansion in any direction, numerous possibilities were considered. The objective was to double the square footage of the original building with new construction that would be clearly different but sympathetic. Adding on the side away from the street allowed the original building form to remain the library's principal public image.

The addition's two-level configuration realized construction economies and minimized ground coverage. It also neatly accommodated the two distinct program areas needed: a generous children's and young adults' space, above, and a combination meeting room and gallery, with its own public access, below.

The split-level relationship of the addition took advantage of a downward slope and kept the

Completed in 2009, the addition established a strong kinship with the original library through its prominent use of curved glulam framing—though with simpler geometries than in the original. The new gently curved beams extend beyond glazed walls, maintaining the indoor-outdoor continuity characteristic of the older structure. But the new framing has far less exterior exposure than the original glulams, which rose from the ground and had required some restoration after three decades of weathering.

While the original interior provides a strong sense of enclosure, the new portion opens more widely to a south view over public playing fields. Clerestories in the curved roof of the children's area add ample, controlled natural light. Suspended artificial lighting in both old and new portions is less obtrusive than the bulkier fixtures from the 1970s, taking advantage of recent advances in lighting technology.



ABOVE: Central crossing and skylight of the original building. Photo: John Morris Dixon. UPPER RIGHT: Interior looking toward addition, showing glulam structure. Photo: Robert Mintzes. LOWER RIGHT: New entrance at center, two-story addition at right. Photo: Charles Tribe.

new volume from dominating the existing one. A new, canopied entrance at the joint between new and old, with the main desk just inside it, made it possible to monitor all parts of the building without unduly increasing staff. A nearby elevator serves all three levels. The opportunity to move tall shelving out of the original central crossing enhanced its architectural impact.

To the ongoing debate about whether additions should emulate or contrast with buildings to which they're attached, this one takes an instructive position: doing both, in sensitively adjusted proportions.

—JOHN MORRIS DIXON